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ABSTRACT

Presenting an indepth examination of 12 working class families to determine what they did that either helped or hindered children in making the transition from basic literacy (the ability to decode written symbols) to advanced literacy (the ability to use writing for the acquisition of knowledge), this report focuses on 12 children, 1 from each family, some of whom were doing well and some badly in school. (These children ranged in age from 10 to 13 (grades 4 to 7); seven were Black and five of Irish heritage; and six were boys and six girls.) In the first chapter, the philosophical and research issues that influenced the research are summarized. This is followed by a summary of findings, a discussion of the theoretical significance of the study, and an outline of the report. Criteria for the selection of families, field procedures, and data analysis are provided in the second chapter, while chapter three provides a profile of a family, examining their relations with the marketplace, with their neighbors, and with their kin. This is followed by a profile of the family's literacy use in the marketplace, in housework, in social networks, in the school, for information and entertainment, and for special purposes. The functional and symbolic constraints of the structuring of literacy use are also discussed. The fourth chapter examines the position of the child within the family. Chapter five provides an analysis of two families doing one homework scene each. The report concludes with a chapter that links the research to other sociological studies. (A profile of one family is appended.) (HOD)

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"I teach him everything he learns in school": The Acquisition of Literacy for Learning in Working Class Families

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PREFACE

The following is the final report on NIE contract #400-79-0046.* More information about the research process, the families studied and the data analyzed is available through the Elbenwood Center at Teachers College. Interested persons can also consult Ann Morison's dissertation on three of the families which she studied as fieldworker within the project (1982).

Many persons have contributed in various capacities to the project and report, and we want to recognize the importance of their contributions. Professor Hope Leichter was co-principal investigator during most of the project. She inspired us all to give our best. Professors Byers and Jameson helped, the first with the videotaping of homework scenes, and the second with entry into some of our families. The main fieldworkers with the families were (besides Vera Hamid-Buglione, who also coordinated the project during most of its duration, and Ann Morison) Theresa Hsu, Melanie Lewis, Mary Madigan and Sybil Stevenson. We were also helped in other ways by John Cacace, Verna Denny, Shelley Goldman, Clifford Hill and Denny Taylor. We also want to thank all those who helped us with the mechanical aspects of the production of the report: Durre Ahmed, Wolde Mariam and Diana Muxworthy. We are particularly thankful for the unflappable steadfastness under pressure of Robert Schwarz of the Teachers College Typing Center and his overburdened crew: Shirley Dunlap, Betty Engel, Cathy Gabriel and Gabriella Oldham.

To all, our deepfelt thanks.

Hervé Varenne
February 28, 1982

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND, FINDINGS AND OUTLINE

IF NANCY HANKS*
CAME BACK AS A GHOST
SEEKING NEWS
OF WHAT SHE LOVED MOST
SHE'D ASK FIRST
"WHERE'S MY SON?
WHAT'S HAPPENED TO ABE?
WHAT'S HE DONE?"

"YOU WOULDN'T KNOW
ABOUT MY SON?
DID HE GROW TALL?
DID HE HAVE FUN?
DID HE LEARN TO READ?
DID HE GET TO TOWN?
DO YOU KNOW HIS NAME?
DID HE GET ON?"

Rosemary Benet

---

*Abe Lincoln's mother

We know that Abraham Lincoln did learn to read, and that he got to town, that he got on, and that we know his name. But this poetic reconstruction of the questions the wife of a Middlewestern farmer of the first half of the nineteenth century would ask herself about her son, strikes an echo in our breast for it links together a set of biographical happenings in a manner that possesses a truth that only comes from statements that conform to our expectations: Abe Lincoln learned to read, and he got on. Abe learned to read and this is at least partially why he got on, why he became president. The question also implies an uncertainty: Abe might not learn to read, and he might stay on the land as a sharecropper. And it is proper that a mother should worry about this.

But the poem strikes a chord in us not simply because it links romantic ideas. It strikes a chord because it corresponds to a real fear that we all, as parents, as educators of young children, continue to hold. The vocabulary may have changed from what it was 100 years ago, but the concern is the same. We still fear that our children may not learn to read. They may not get downtown and to the suburbs. They may stay locked in their ethnic neighborhoods, protected but also imprisoned. The poem is made even more appropriate by being put in the mouth of the mother who cares, a parent who organizes her children so that they can learn to read. She does not ask "did he go to school." She asks: "did he learn to read?" Lincoln indeed did not attend the great schools and universities of his time. He gained his education "on his own," which means that his family, and his communities, were organized to allow him to develop his talents. Lincoln's personal biography is of course exceptional and totally atypical in its detail. Learning to read may be necessary to become president, but it is far from sufficient. And yet there is something that is generalizable in this biography.

The families and community that helped Lincoln also helped others to accomplish their social destiny--even if that destiny was not to lead them to the heights Lincoln climbed. We know for a historical fact that many became literate at a high level in the United States of the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries even in the absence of schools or through schools that have no relationships to the all encompassing institutions which we now associate with the category (Cremin, 1970, 1980; Tyack, 1979).

But all this, however historically accurate, can also attain a mythical aura that can prevent us from drawing the proper lessons for our times. We would, of course, like to recapture what now appears like the educational vitality of a past era. We would like to see families and communities more deliberately take again responsibilities that they seem to have lost to the schools and "experts." We may even be aware, as was the child who composed the line we use as our title, that "we," as parents and siblings, "teach him everything he learns in school." And yet, as our awareness grows that the schools are not the only institutions that educate, we are also beginning to realize that things are much more complex than the altogether rosy picture presented by the myth of the self-educated person. It is not simply that families used to educate and now that they do not. It is rather that the exact routing of overall social impulses along institutional lines has changed enough over time either to highlight or to hide the role of the various institutions. Thus we do not "see" the school in the early centuries of modernity and yet something like

it must have been there if only as a set of formal prescriptions that directed the people in specific directions. Thus we do not see the family in the last century. But we must go beyond these initial perceptions. We must recognize that, in our modern world and to the extent that children are still raised in families, these families must be doing something. They must, in particular, be doing some of its educative tasks.

These issues form the background of the work we report on. They have come to national attention in the past decade, and they have generated much work in the educational sciences. Our work is a response to this push for a better understanding of the role of the environment of the school on what happens in it. It is, we believe, a contribution to the further elaboration of our joint understanding of the educational process in the United States in particular, and in urban industrialized societies in general. To do this, we looked in depth at 12 working class families from the point of view of their use of literacy in their conduct of everyday life. We focused particularly on twelve children, one from each family, some of whom were doing well in school and some badly. These children ranged in age from 10 to 12 (grades 4 to 7). Seven were of Black and five of Irish heritage. Six were boys and six girls. Using limited participant-observation, informal interviewing and the video-taping of a homework scene, we got to know these children and their families well. This knowledge of the literacy experiences of these people form the basis for our findings.

These findings consist above all in the observation that the educational functions performed by the families look like nothing which school-based expectations of what learning looks like might lead one to expect. These families educate, but they do not educate the way schools do (or at least not as schools are thought to do according to received current knowledge). Indeed the way they educate least is the way which they borrow from the school: the supervising of homework. What they do educationally is fundamentally different from what it is that schools do. The educational styles of these families appear greatly constrained by the differential opportunities available in their different social positions (even when their particular adaptation is extremely atypical). This means that what they do within their families is constrained by what they have to deal with including the school and its requirements. We thus end up with an account of both differences and interdependencies between home and school.

In this introduction, we first summarize the philosophical and research issues that have driven our research. This is followed by a summary of findings. The introduction ends with a discussion of the theoretical significance of the study and an outline of the report.

A. BACKGROUND

1. The eclipse of the family as educator

To say that "a multiplicity of institutions educate--families and churches, schools and colleges, museums and libraries, summer camps and settlement houses," and that "whether consciously or not, such institutions tend at any given time to relate to one another in what might be called configurations of education"

(Cremin, 1974:1), is to state a problem for analysis. It is potentially to make our analyses more powerful. It is also to make them initially much more difficult. What do all these institutions do? And, more importantly, how do they relate to each other? When we say that, in the early years of the modern world families organized themselves so that minimal schooling should be offered in their community, do we say that this was a private act that just happened to occur frequently and then, cumulatively, led to the educational explosion that eventually occurred? Or are we saying that, in some ways, the apparently 'individual' desires of persons and families were themselves triggered by an environment so organized as to kindle desire, and make it appear that it had been self-generated, self-produced and self-actualized?

Historically, there is little doubt that the intellectualism of the Renaissance, joined with, or transformed into, the focus on personal salvation typical of Protestant religiosity, directly produced the central structural characteristics of the modern world in which we are still living. We are a civilization that emphasizes that men are separate and so we feel that we are separate, we believe we act privately (and differently from the way others do in their privacy), and, often, we realize that this produces as much pain as glory (Henry, 1963; Slater, 1970). It is equally certain that our religions and ideologies are social, public events--even though they possess the specific power of focussing the society on the independence and agency of the individual as a private being. That Protestant ideology should have this effect, on social organization, political economy and general ideology, is something that has been emphasized many times, in the works of de Tocqueville (1969), Max Weber (1958), or, more recently, Louis Dumont (1965, 1977). Thus it is not surprising that this ideology should have a direct impact on educational processes, both at the cultural level of its symbolization, ritualization and choreography and at the social level of its administration, organization and impact over behavior (Varenne, 1978, 1982, forthcoming; Varenne and Kelly, 1976).

The central organizational question for an archtypical Protestant of a puritanical bent had to do with the necessity that the congregation be made of persons who--as individual persons--could read. To become members children had to learn--individually. And they had to do this relatively early. This was a social need. This religious need was later transformed into a political need as the religious ideology transformed itself into a political one that formed the constitutional bases of the new democracies. As this happened, it became so evident that citizens had to possess some minimal education that, in the United States, England and France, the number of schools and the rate of literacy increased greatly even before the need for such an education was fully articulated by the first theoreticians of public, mass education (Furet & Ozouf, 1977). And yet this time of final consolidation is also the time when the creators of the new systems lost a vision of the roles local communities and families had played in the social movements that made them successful.

This is not the place to discuss the reasons that led to the disappearance of the family from the imagination of those who, in the first half of the nineteenth century, laid the foundations of the myth of the school as the overwhelmingly powerful and, in fact, unique educative force in modern societies. Many things probably came together, the difficulty that committed families probably always had in finding the resources to educate their children on their

own and the apparent efficiency of a system that pooled children of the same age from one community and assigned one adult to perform the educative labor necessary for the functioning of the whole community. This process of role differentiation is a normal sociological one. And it must have been particularly powerful in the new towns of the American frontier that were so redundantly organized in terms of voluntary, community-based ad hoc groups. It is also clear that the early political philosophers, though theoretically relying on the national wisdom of individuals, could not quite trust them in fact to educate themselves into the necessary knowledge. This probably explains why the belief that schools should be open to every child so that each would have the opportunity to become educated even when their parents were not capable of providing this education themselves, became the belief that school attendance should be made compulsory.

In any event, by the time Horace Mann wrote his famous reports to the Massachusetts Board of Education, the centrality of the school as the preeminent institution for education was well established. In the fascinating report that he consecrates to the teaching of reading, spelling and composition, Mann does not once make mention of the family as the place where some of this instruction might start. As far as educators are concerned, Cremin has shown (1976) that the family indeed disappeared from their imagination, even when, like John Dewey, they were particularly aware of the primordiality of the broad social environment in the process that shapes children to become particular types of persons in particular kinds of society. Dewey also knew of the dangers that attended school education as it, of necessity, became divorced from the daily affairs which the children attended to jointly with their parents. Dewey is aware of something that Mann was not concerned with. But he is also convinced of the necessity of the school as a special institution in "advanced" society and he associates what we may call "participant-education" with "low grade society" (1916:8). He does not try to put to use the possibilities inherent in the fact that children, for several years before they start formal school, and even later, extensively share activities with their parents. It is certain that these activities are educative and that they can be made even more explicitly so if parents are encouraged.

Until now, of course, parents have been rather actively discouraged. It is not uncommon to hear parents tell stories of encounters with teachers who complained that they should not have tried to teach their children to read, that by doing so they disrupted the order of the classroom and placed the children at a disadvantage. The general attitude of the educational industry has been "leave the educating to us!" At most, parents are told to "value" education, to make certain that their children respect teachers and learning--and of course to pay the taxes that support the teachers. Given the orientation of the experts, the administrative problems associated with the organization of schools, and other socio-economic pressures, it is not surprising that the role of the parents in the education of their children has, until recently, mostly been seen as consisting of the setting of a broad environment conducive to learning but not itself educational in an actual, "instrumental" sense. It is probable that this refusal to see the family as much more than a place where personality is developed in essentially implicit rather than didactic ways, was reinforced by the feeling that the family itself was losing its overall functionality. In Parsons' famous phrase, families would now only be "'factories' which produce

human personalities" (1955:16). Social instrumentality was rejected as something that only happened outside the home, in the workplace, and in the schools.

As often happens, when a theoretical position is taken by a powerful author to its extreme and is expressed in the starkest sense, the absurdity of the position also emerges. For the generation of students that followed and learned their sociology through Parsonian texts, it often became a point of honor to show that, even in our societies, the family remains in fact a central institution the functions of which go much beyond the expressive one that Parsons had assigned to it. Women sociologists emphasized that women who stayed at home did much more than love their children. They also performed hosts of extremely instrumental tasks including cooking, cleaning, babysitting, etc. Other sociologists demonstrated the continuing strength of extended family ties (Leichter & Mitchell, 1978). Economists reminded us that the family is still the basic conduit through which the necessary financial resources that our societies must spend to raise children are routed. And this of course was used to explain why social opportunities are not distributed equally among children and why, as sociologists of education have shown, the rate of success among the children of the upper classes is higher than the rate of success among the children of the lower classes.

From these quarters, and from many others too, we have thus been reminded of the power of the family as an institution within the broad society and, of particular interest to us, as a central aspect of the educative process--however one may wish to understand it. Thus it has been shown that those children who are the most likely to find it easy to learn in school are those whose parents have read to them so extensively at home that they almost know how to read by the time they enter kindergarten. Furthermore we have the many studies which indicate that all aspects of a child's familial environment have a direct impact upon the success of the child in school--from the kind of language used by the parents to talk to these children, to the number of books owned by the parents, to the behaviors instilled in relation to television, etc. When all this is put together, it is then normal to focus on the role of the family.

2. Literacy and Society

This rediscovery of the importance of the family by historians, sociologists and now by educators in general is also a rediscovery of the role of the social in the shaping of individual performance. It has proven very difficult to integrate in theory and in practice the Durkheimian insight that education is not something that happens to individuals but something that happens to a society (1922). This is even more difficult to do when one discusses literacy. We have inherited the idea that literacy is a special--and certainly very powerful--communication form, the main impact of which is on the behavior, outlook and relative power of success of those individuals who have access to it. As the democratic rhetoric of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries destroyed the argument that literacy is too powerful a tool to be handed over to the common man, we still generally preserved the idea that it is only as individuals become literate that society is transformed. This was the argument of the advocates of universal literacy as they stressed its value for liberal education, democratic government and a more rapid industrialization. Today

still, it seems to us that we are a literate society only to the extent that we are all literate or that, at the very least, the overwhelming majority among us are. To the extent that surveys tell us that this is so, we fell comfortable in stating that we are a 'literate' society and that our civilization, our science, our technology and our general way of life are all in some way dependent upon the general spread of literacy throughout all classes of society. But in fact there is little knowledge of what it means to be a literate society, and, by extension, to be a literate family. The focus has been elsewhere. It is paradoxical that we should know more about the rise of universal literacy and its purported effect on modes of thought (Goody, 1977) than we know about the exact characteristics of literacy use in everyday life. This is particularly true in our own societies.

There does exist a small number of studies conducted in non-industrial societies that outline the place of literacy in social life because it is comparatively 'surprising' (Basso and Anderson, 1973; Conklin, 1949; Ferguson, 1972; Hostetler & Huntington, 1971; Goody, 1968, 1977; Howe, 1978; Modiano, 1973; Philips, 1976; Rawski, 1979; Scribner & Cole, 1981). Our own societies are not so surprising. People assume that they know what makes them literate. But it has been a point of dispute in the historical literature (Cipolla, 1970; Cremin, 1970, 1980; Lockridge, 1974; Graff, 1980)--for here also we have a surprise provoking distance. But for contemporary times we have little empirical base for our ideas about the nature or function of literacy. We have some knowledge of the extension of limited kinds of literacy (for example, the number of people who 'know' how to read the front page of a newspaper or an army cooking manual). But even here we do not quite know what is implied by this apparent knowledge, or even whether particular degrees of reading competence have any relation to the different kinds of content found in texts of different difficulty levels (Sticht, 1975). Even when we have some figures about the consumption of various kinds of print stratified by social class and kinds of people, we do not know what people do with the books and papers that they buy (Szwed, 1977). Furthermore, the broad theories of the importance of literacy that we have been mentioning imply that literacy is much more than reading books. As Goody (1977) emphasizes, what is important about literacy--for it is what actually makes ours a society of a particular kind--is the fact that the dominant idols of the tribe and marketplace are only available through literacy practices of a particular kind, which is why it is essential to focus on how people engage print in daily life as they make shopping lists, follow the cooking recipes, child rearing recommendations, or interpersonal advice (in cookbooks, manuals or Ann Landers' column), or expect their medicine to be 'pre-scribed,' (that is, written in advance so that they can apply the doctor's words 'to the letter'), etc. And yet we have little documentation of the extent to which people do make lists, follow recipes and prescriptions.

B. OUTLINE OF FINDINGS

The general purpose of the study was to examine, within the context of everyday family life, the processes that influence children's acquisition of literacy for learning. The chief aim was to find out what families do that either helps or hinders children in making the transition from basic literacy (the ability to decode written symbols) to advanced literacy (the ability to use

writing for the acquisition of knowledge). The general framework for the study stressed the probability that, even in our modern societies, families continue to play a fundamental role in the education of children, that this role is probably quite instrumental, but that we cannot yet specify what this role is and how it is integrated with the roles other institutions play in the education of children. The framework also stressed that literacy is a social competence, a property of societies, communities and families. This meant that we understood our task from the beginning as consisting in the analysis of social environments. We realized that there were few clear guidelines about how to proceed along these lines. We felt however that this is where most knowledge could be gained.

We also started with a series of organizing questions which oriented us as we began the fieldwork. These three main questions are:

1) How do family members interact with each other and with children in particular in ways that promote literacy for learning?

2) In what ways do the child's own actions promote mastery of literacy skills of learning?

3) In what ways do the family's relationships with significant social institutions and resources in the community provide a context for identifying and understanding activities in the home?

We discovered early on that, taken literally, the questions are misleading in that they assume a positive answer to a preceding question that we have learned to ask only in retrospect and yet which we find to be of profound significance. Do families in fact do anything that promotes literacy for learning? For many families we cannot tell 'how' family members promote literacy for learning (question 1) because they do so little of it, at least in the narrow academic ways that we know how to look for. Similarly, we cannot tell 'in what ways' a child promotes his own mastery (question 2) because many of our children also do little in this vein.

But, of course, we cannot stop here. Just because learning is hard to see does not mean that it does not get done. The families and the children are literate, but their use of literacy does not superficially conform to our expectations of what it means to be 'literate for learning.' Given these cautionary markers, we can now proceed with a summary of the findings. We state these findings in terms of six major findings with a number of sub-findings that specify more exactly what they are relevant to:

1) <u>Functioning in a literate society</u>: All the families (and all of the individuals within them) are functioning at the position or role they hold in their communities (or families):

a) All the families participate in a wide range of daily literacy activities. These include not only literacy for school, but literacy for the market place (bills, lists, etc.), for human relations (greeting cards, letters), for news (papers and magazines), for pleasure, etc.;

in such a way that all the participants can be satisfied that it has been accomplished and thus does not have to be repeated;

c) All of the children, however well or badly they are doing in school, can handle whatever literacy comes their way in the family;

d) Whatever their suffering, family problems are not caused by the fact that members cannot handle enough literacy to be functioning at some level within the broader society; aside from fulfilling entrance criteria, members of working families are asked to display little advanced literacy;

e) For none of the children, and none of the families, is literacy an explicitly recognized functional problem, aside from school and school-like evaluations;

f) Given a society with more openings for their skills, most families could function at a more complex level;

2) Varieties in types of functioning: Social class must be understood as a set of contraints to which families must respond. These responses can be extremely varied, and the members of our working class families participate in a wide range of literacy activities:

a) Some individuals use literacy so rarely, it is possible to doubt the extent of their basic literacy, whereas others are going to college and are avid readers;

b) Most of our families have children who succeed and children who fail in school;

c) Some of the variation is probably related to community controlled structural differentiation;

d) Some of the variation is related to a family controlled division of labor among members of the family;

e) Most of our families had children who had succeeded and children who had failed in school;

f) Most families do not use literacy as a liberating force, i.e., for what it can bring them politically.

3) Live Conversations in Literate Society: Many of our families mainly interact with each other through "live" communicational media (face to face conversations and the telephone):

a) When families are involved in literacy acts, it is typically as part of immediately on-going conversations;

b) Some families are almost never involved in the generation of literacy, i.e., they almost never write;

c) Literacy is rarely a central concern in the lives of the families, except as it concerns their children's sanctioned success or failure in schools;

d) The broad institutions with which families interact (the institutions that give them jobs, educate their children, provide their entertainment or organize their spiritual life) do not organize situations that demand participation in the more literate kinds of literacy;

4) Families are not schools: What families do educationally is fundamentally different from what it is that schools do:

a) Within the activities they directly control, families rarely distinguish which activities are "educational" and which are not;

b) Families rarely "teach" children in the narrow school sense; that is, the highly ritualized teacher-student dance well recognized by Americans is saved for when school tasks are brought home;

c) Families rarely test childen and thus children almost never "fail" family education; eventual adequate performance, and not the diagnosis of component skills, forms the focus of most tasks at home;

d) The education that families provide arises from the involvements of children in scenes with specific structures deeply embedded in the flow of every day goals and possibilities;

5) Families are structurally well integrated with the school as it is presently constituted. Families rarely question the legitimacy of the school as the educational institution par excellence. Organizationally, this means that home and school are working on most of the same assumptions about what schools can accomplish and evaluate:

a) Families never question the idea that mobility is dependent upon an official statement from a school guaranteeing that one has been academically successful;

b) The actual school their children attend is a central concern of all the families, particularly when, as often happens, the parents are dissatisfied with it;

c) Families know how to act school-like (as in the organization of homework scenes) and seem to treat such moments as important;

6) Homework can be a problem: When families do arrange school-like teaching-learning scenes, they can enhance their children's chances of school success, although this is not always the case:

a) Our most successful families put considerable effort into school work at home;

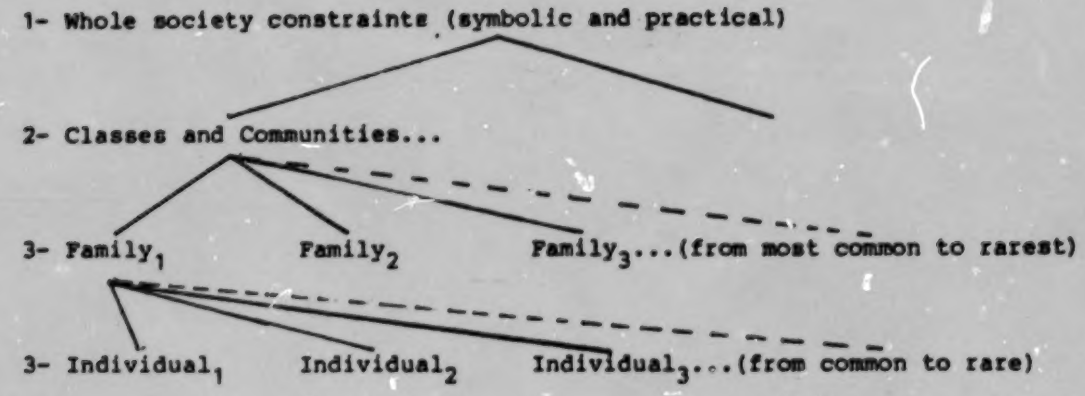
b) Parents who work diligently with their children on homework can actually impede school progress by keeping children off task and anxious about their work. They do this not so much because of a home-school mismatch in what should be known, but because of the contradictory place of school tasks in the flow of opportunities within their communities.

C. THEORETICAL SIGNIFICANCE

In the section on the research process which follows this introduction, we briefly describe the steps we have taken to arrive at these findings. It is important to note, however, that such a list of findings can be misleading. Each finding stands as a reasonable generalization from our observations or as tentative hypotheses suggesting the need for further research. But the ultimate value of ethnographic research resides in the accounts it gives of the relationship between holistic observation and theoretical generalization. Thus the theoretical work which we mentioned earlier and which focused the attention of those who study modern societies on communication and thus literacy framed our observations. Conversely these observations served to sharpen theoretical statements about the power of literacy for education, and then for life, that had remained vague. This is why we consider the analytic scheme which we now use to present the data as much, if not more, of a "finding" than the preceding list.

One can get an initial feel for this scheme by looking carefully at the list of findings for the theoretical relevance of each item. Some findings concern general structural constraints. Others concern dominant or possible responses to these constraints. Thus, finding (3) ("Live conversations in literate society") deals with a structural constraint: "(d) The broad institutions with which families interact (the institutions that give them jobs, educate their children, provide their entertainment or organize their spiritual life) do not organize situations that demand participation in the more literate kinds of literacy." It also deals with possible ways that families have to handle this constraint: "(a) When families are involved in literacy acts, it is typically as part of immediately on-going conversations," "(b) Some families almost never write." Constraints do not absolutely determine what the people who have to deal with them in fact do. Within a system of constraints certain things are easier to do and these end up being the dominant mode of behavior. But this does not mean that people cannot rise against the constraints and do things that are altogether untypical.

Our analysis has two main characteristics. It is hierarchical and processual. We have thought about our data in terms of a hierarchical scheme in which higher encompassing levels constrain what happens at lower levels. This scheme can be visualized in the following manner:



The higher levels, depending on the point of view chosen at various times in the analysis (whether that of the family or individual), include those social forces which are generally treated as matters of "social structure," "community structure" or "family organization." Our decision to use a slightly different vocabulary stems in part from our desire to escape the the statism associated with many presentations of structural analyses. "The" social structure, for us, is a very practical achievement by all the persons who together make it what it is. It is something that people produce and, of particular consequence in a study of educational processes, it is something that people are continually re-producing in an uncertain future, across generations. The analytic challenge which we are picking in this work lies in the attempt to reach an understanding of the way physiologically separate individuals, each with radically different positions within social encounters, each with different opinions, outlooks, personalities, end up producing something that can also be seen as massively constraining orderly environments. It is central to us that literacy is at the heart of these sociological processes. At all the levels with which we deal, and in every context, literacy is an issue: It is always potentially available as a communicational medium, in the sense that 1) the exact organization of its use constitutes the social relationships established between various people, and 2) that the ability to perform special literacy tasks in special settings is used as a justification for the place people actually occupy within an interaction -- even when the shape of the social world which determines the existence of such places has nothing to do with individual competence strictly (biologically) understood.

D. OUTLINE OF REPORT

The last chapter of this report is a longer discussion of this theoretical stance. In it we make an argument for the contribution our work makes to the problems we just mentioned. At the same time we summarize our reasons for believing that such a theoretical stance is in fact the one that can best account for the complexity of the data which we present in the body of the report. The data presentation itself is organized in terms of the theoretical stance. After a chapter in which we describe our methodology (Chapter II), we focus on one family through three different lenses. At a first stage, (Chapter III), we

present the "Farrells" as a unit struggling within constraints placed on working class families in New York City. We emphasize their uniqueness while searching for the conditions which allow for this uniqueness, limit its range, and differentially reward the various responses which the Farrells organize. In this chapter, as in the following one, the data which we collected about the eleven other families in our sample remains in the background. It is used only to highlight the uniqueness of the Farrells, a uniqueness which, for us, is typical. In other words, we know, through our preliminary analyses of the data from the other families, that any other family on which we had concentrated as focussed a gaze as we did on the Farrells would have appeared as unique in their responses as the Farrells appear to be. As far as we can see, there is no way that any family within a neighborhood or city, or any member of a family, would not appear unique insofar as the control which institutions, other families, and other members of the family, may exercise over any individual unit can only be operated through the setting of conditions and the responses to responses by the individual unit. The response itself, as something that "will happen next" in an uncertain future, is necessarily indeterminate. It is expectable that this response should vary from unit to unit and thus appear "unique" while being the product of an inflexible process.

The uniqueness of a response does not make it less tied to its immediate context and the organization of this context. This fundamental principle to our analysis is further applied as we look at the position of one child within the family (Chapter IV). Here again, it is our intention to highlight the way in which a child like Sheila Farrell can actually be considered a part of her family so that all that can be said about her family can be said about her. Through an investigation of several aspects of Sheila's participation in her family's literacy, we emphasize the uniqueness of her position within this family and the organization of this uniqueness as a joint production that is highly structured. The theoretical generality of the principle is further illustrated when we look, in the last chapter of the analysis (Chapter V), at two families doing one homework scene each. While the scale of this analysis is such as to magnify greatly events which were performed below the level of consciousness, we show that the conversational processes though which homework scenes are performed in homes can be characterized by the same general principle that is operating at levels where explicit consciousness seems fully involved, or at those levels where the constraints are so massive and general as to be above consciousness. This general principle can be summarized as <u>the joint achievement of structured differentiation in uncertainty</u>.

In the last chapter to this report (VI), we make a longer theoretical statement of this principle. We link our work to various sociological schools that have struggled in different ways and with different success with the apparently contradictory evidence that human behavior is strongly structured and also that any single behavior is always, in some significant way unique and idiosyncratic. We rely in particular on Bateson's (1972) discussion of feedback processes in human communication in general, and familial organization in particular. We also rely on Bourdieu's (1977) work on strategic reproduction. Their work is the most immediate basis for our own account. This account does depart from theirs, particularly to the extent that it exploits possibilities that they do not develop. We suggest a new way of understanding the linkages between personal competence, familial environment and school performance. In

particular, we demonstrate that while it is very appropriate to talk of familial styles, social structures and cultures, it is not possible to assume that simple participation within a family will transform itself into a certain kind of personal competence for a child in any simple, mechanical manner. The transfer processes that make children from certain background seem to succeed more easily in schools are even more complex and less mechanical in their operation. The statistical correlations that can be made between any of these apparent characteristics of individuals must be seen as posing problems rather than suggesting solutions. While our research was not designed to pursue in any detail the way children actually integrate their membership in various small scale groups -- their families, their friends, their classmates and children -- we are certain that it is only through such an investigation that further knowledge can be gained.

CHAPTER TWO

THE RESEARCH PROCESS: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

A. CRITERIA FOR SELECTION OF SUBJECTS AND FAMILIES AND UNITS OF STUDY

a) The operationalization of the criteria of age, sex, success in school, ethnicity and income. The research was organized around twelve children who were partially chosen in terms of strictly defined criteria defined a priori. These criteria were age (all children were between 9 and 12 years old--grades 4 to 6), sex (half were male, half female), success in school (seven were doing well on reading tests given by the school, five were not), ethnicity (seven were "Black," five "Irish"), and income of parents (all had to have "low incomes"). The accompanying tables (Table 1 and 2) show how the twelve families and children studied fit within these criteria. Success in school was determined by the performance of children in tests given to the children by the school soon before we started studying them. Ethnicity was defined in terms of the self identification of at least one of the parents (generally both parents in our sample). Low income was defined as meaning that less than $15,000 a year (a low income in the context of New York City prices) was available to the household unit that included the target child.

Early on we decided that "low income" is too artificial and broad a category to be useful without both further refinement. To the criterion of

TABLE 1

HOW THE TARGET CHILDREN RELATE TO THE SELECTION CRITERIA

Surname	Ethnicity	Sex	Age	Grade	Reading Level
Ali	Black	F	12	7	High
Brodie	Irish	M	11	6	Low
Brown	Black	F	11	6	High
Cummins	Irish	F	11	6	High
Farrell	Irish	F	11	6	High
Jackson	Black	M	12	7	High
Kinney	Irish	M	9	4	Low
Lewis	Black	F	12	7	Low
Swanson	Black	M	12	6	Low
Taylor	Black	M	11	5	Low
Tivnan	Irish	M	12	7	High
Watkins	Black	F	11	6	High

TABLE 2

SUMMARY OF HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Surname Pseudonyms	Adults Present In Household	Siblings Pseudonyms	Sibling Age	Reading Level	Income Available to Household
Ali	Mother	Sandra	12	High	$ 8,000
		*Shyama	11	High	
		Anwar	10	High	
Brodie	Mother	Lonnie	13	High	$ 12,000
	Grandmother	*Mickey	11	Low	
		Suzie	5	---	
Brown	Mother	*Jerrard	11	High	$ 12,000
	Father	Alicia	4	High	
Cummins	Mother	*Karen	11	High	$ 15,000
	Father	Nicole	7	High	
Farrell	Mother	*Sheila	11	High	$ 15,000
	Father	Maura	1	---	
Jackson	Mother	Lisa	16	High	$ 12,500
	Step-father	*Randy	12	High	
		Linda	11	---	
		Eric	9	Low	
		Kenny	6 mos.	---	
Kinney	Mother	Kathleen	11	Moderate	$ 10,000
		*Joe	9	Low	
Lewis	Mother	Margie	23	Moderate	$ 6,000
		Sherry	22	High	
		John	20	Low	
		*Alice	12	Low	
Swanson	Mother	Donna	13	High	$ 7,500
	Mother's	*Gary	12	Low	
	boyfriend	Sandra	10	---	
Taylor	Mother	Faye	23	High	$ 12,000
		Cecile	22	Moderate	
		*Billy	11	Low	
		Serena	4	---	
Tivnan	Mother	Bridget	13	High	$ 15,000
	Father	*John	12	High	
		Margaret	8	High	
Watkins	Mother	Novetta	18	---	$ 9,000
	Mother's	Richie	17	---	
	brother	*Lynelle	11	High	

income, we thus added the criterion of occupation: the parents of all the children have occupations traditionally identified with what can be labelled the 'working class,' viz. blue collar workers and people in jobs in the service industries (like clerks or secretaries) where they have limited autonomy and responsibility over the performance of their tasks. Our informants are telephone operators, truck and bus drivers, secretaries, bank clerks, postmen, home attendants, etc. We purposefully did not use the criterion of 'education' since this is such an important aspect of our research. Many of the kind of people we are studying have been gaining a fair amount of college education in the past decade. This is an interesting phenomenon in itself as it reveals some of the mechanisms of potential mobility that we in fact do want to document for their children.

b) The 'working class' label. We are aware that the phrase 'working class' we use to qualify our population can be misleading. It has the advantage of being less pejorative than that of "lower class." It conveys the idea of a group of people who share a common position within a social structure that defines the position and the set of constraints with which the people must deal. In this sense, the phrase conveys the feeling of a group of people who are totally integrated within a larger society and are fully functioning within it. This certainly corresponds to our understanding of the people in our sample. Furthermore, to think of a class as a social position and a set of constraints allows us to preserve the fact that our families do handle similar constraints differently one from the other. Thus, we have families that look extremely like the stereotypes associated with the working class label. We have other families that are essentially indistinguishable in their life style from the stereotype of the "normal" middle class family.

B. FIELD PROCEDURES

1. Selection of families

Families were contacted through a variety of sources including social welfare agencies and centers, personal and professional contacts of the main investigators and of the research assistants, friends and kin. To be suitable a family had to correspond to the criteria defined in the proposal and it had to be willing to give the research the extensive involvement required. Finding such families was rather difficult but we were eventually successful. We did have to make some compromises since it was particularly difficult to find families where children, particularly girls, were not doing well on literacy tasks in school. This has produced the imbalance between membership in the various categories that is revealed in Table 1. We do not feel that this imbalance impedes in any way our ability to make the type of generalizations from our data that ethnographic studies can make. It is obvious that, even if we had been able to attain strict balance between the categories the data collected could not be handled as data can be when large numbers of subjects selected randomly are examined. Our sample is extremely biased in ways which we cannot quite know. This is an inherent limitation of all ethnographic studies. This limitation means that certain kinds of statements about what has been found through the study cannot be made (particularly probabilistic ones). But other statements can be made with great confidence.

2. Field procedures

The data collection involved three main activities: participant-observation, interviewing and video-taping of selected scenes.*

a) Participant-observation

Fieldworkers went into families at those times when the families agreed to allow them to visit and carried out observations of whatever activity was taking place, at the same time that they tried to join in those activities. These observations were carried out in a variety of settings, at home, in school and in community settings. For example, fieldworkers both observed and participated in i) housework and chores; ii) children doing homework and having it checked; iii) watching television; iv) joining in conversations and discussions; vii) sharing meals; viii) going on outings; ix) shopping. The procedure for recording observations was dependent on the fieldworker's on-the-spot judgment as to when it might be appropriate to take notes on a pad or in a notebook, when it might be appropriate to ask if a tape-recorder might be used, etc. If neither of these were possible, the fieldworkers wrote their observations as soon as possible after leaving the field site. None of the field workers were able to live with the families. This means that a lot of information about the families activities had to be gained through intensive interviewing.

b) Interviewing

Interviewing was not carried out as separate activity from participant-observation. In each case where particular individuals in the family such as a parent, sibling or the target child had been singled out for particular questioning, this always occurred with several interruptions, other family members joining in and the usual household activity going on, unless the person was alone in the house, which was rare. In asking questions fieldworkers were asked to keep in mind the kind of data that they must ultimately collect, e.g.: i) general family history; ii) history of literacy in the family and for individual members; iii) content of current literacy practices and experiences; iv) family members' perceptions of the functions of literacy; v) history of family's contact with the schools attended by their children and their perceptions of "school literacy." Based on such core questions, fieldworkers were free to adapt the mix of questions, language, and style which they found most suitable. The following kind of people were interviewed: i) household members; ii) extended family members; iii) the focal child's peers; iv) friends and or neighbors; v) school teachers, administrators and other school personnel.

c) Video-taping

The choice of events to be taped and the time for the taping was made after a sufficient knowledge of the family had been gained through other means and after rapport had been established. The evening was eventually chosen

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*Other activities included taking photographs and collecting literacy artifacts. These were not performed systematically and were not used for analysis.

since it would be the most likely time for both adults and children of the household to be present in a reasonably relaxed frame of mind. We tried to tape formally defined "homework" scenes but were successful in only some of the families. Other families steered us to tape general conversation or meals. We accepted but have only used the homework scenes for analysis.

C. ANALYSIS

1. Data reduction

The first step consisted in a series of meetings between the investigators and the fieldworkers during which were established lists of activities engaged in by the families that involved any kind of literacy. This list (as organized in terms of the function of the activities within the everyday life of the families) is the following:

a) Literacy for Use in the Marketplace

- Literacy on the Job
- Literacy and Shopping
- Literacy and Paying Bills
- Literacy and Dealing with Forms

b) Literacy Around Housework

- Literacy and Preparation of Food
- Literacy and Household Maintenance

c) Literacy and the Social Network

- Literacy and the Mail
- Literacy and Celebration of Important Occasions Through Greeting Card or Poster Displays
- Literacy and Intrahousehold Messages
- Literacy and Reminders
- Literacy and Photo Albums

d) Literacy and the School

- Literacy and Homework
- Literacy and Report Cards
- Literacy and Reference Materials

e) Literacy for Information/Entertainment

- Literacy and Books in General
- Literacy and Newspapers
- Literacy and Magazines
- Literacy and Comic Books
- Literacy and the T.V.
- Literacy and Hobbies and/or Games

f) Literacy for Special Purposes

Literacy and Religion
Literacy and Political Participation
Literacy and Clubs

Under each heading on this list we noted the kind of literacy that we had observed or was reported to us for each of the families. Most of the families offered examples in every one of the first five categories of literacy that we list here. Some performed the activity only once during our visits, often many times more. When information was missing, we sent fieldworkers back to check whether the absence was the product of a lapse in observation, or reflected the family's own style. We were thus able to compare families (and family members) among themselves on each of the activities and also to compare their style of operation across the various categories. This provided us with our basic understanding of the range of literacy activities in which families participated, and the range of styles that families could adopt vis-a-vis this literacy. We noted for example that the first five broad categories that we listed include activities that all families had to deal with, however differently they did it. The last category includes items that were found in only some of the families or even only in one. This alternance between universality and singularity was the basis for our analysis of social constraints and types of responses which was then carried back to all the categories in order to evaluate the extent of external imposition of the literacy form and the types of familial construction of this activity.

The second step in the analysis led us to look at all the family activities from the point of view of the extent to which the target children were directly involved in them. This led us to think of the familial input into the development of literacy for learning in their children as a continuum with three main points:

a) literacy events in a family when adults handle printed materials, seek no attention from the children, and apparently attract none;

b) literacy events in which the adults engage their children in a task of some immediate relevance to both and that require the performance of a literate act by the children;

c) literacy events in which an adult explictly sets out to instruct a child in a particular skill in a manner that is directly inspired by the school--or by the adult's perception of what school instruction is like.

The model was applicable to all of the families since, in each case, their literacy activities could be looked at from this point of view. The model helped us to think about the value of familial education and the relative effectiveness of the various possible approaches to child involvement. It helped us in particular to see that all the children could handle all the literacy tasks that their parents expected them to be able to handle which, to us, explains why literacy was never a problem for these families as such. Literacy always became a problem in relation to school, when unsatisfactory report cards were presented. While we make some informal hypotheses as to the

likely type of familial involvement that leads to school success, these should only be taken as informed hunches. Our data were not of the kind that allows for such generalizations.

The last step in the data reduction involved the writing of "family portraits" which summarize our knowledge of the families as separate units.

The results of these three steps were then used as a background for the communicational analysis of the video-taped homework scene.

2. Communicational analysis

According to the principles that have become traditional in the field (McQuown et al., 1971; Scheflen, 1973), we began by watching repeatedly sections of two tapes (about 15 minutes in each case). This was done in various settings: in a viewing room with few watchers, in seminars and classes, etc. During such viewings, there were wide ranging discussions about what was occurring on the tape, hypotheses were raised and discarded on the basis of the actual events which the discussions helped focus on. At the same time transcripts were made.

Eventually, it became possible to isolate within the tape organized sequences, structured positionings, patterned role performances, etc. It became possible to specify what were the events which produced in those who observed the tapes general impressions that things were going well and smoothly (as they do among the Farrells) or that the people were struggling (as the Kinneys seem to). Thus we can now point to the integration of non-homework matters into the homework scene among the Farrells as what can give the feeling that things are going well. We can point at a kind of stuttering in the performance of homework sequences among the Kinneys which can give the feeling of interpersonal difficulties.

In a final step, we related the describable patterns to broader social structural and cultural patterns which we knew to be operative from our fieldwork and our general knowledge of American society. In the process we departed somewhat from the traditional outcome of communicational analyses which, until now, have mostly been oriented to the specification of the quality of relationship around "such themes as dominance, submission, dependence, spectatorship, competition, cooperation, intimacy, distance, etc." (McQuown et al., 1968: Chapter 9, p. 11). While such statements were never intended to deny the relevance of historical matters which constrain the situations in which people find themselves or provide them with specific ways of dealing with each other, most research has in fact not pursued very far the matter of the relation of small scale interpersonal events to broad scale social structural events. This is somewhat uncharted territory, but we feel it is necessary to explore it in order to fulfill our mandate about literacy and familial education.

3. The production of the findings

The preceding two types of analyses formed the basis for the findings we stated earlier. We noted then that some of the findings were stated in terms of universal constraints. These concern matters that our families had to deal with pervasively. A brief example may clarify the process: All families have to pay bills. This always involves some literacy (reading the bill). This literacy is obviously extremely limited. Furthermore we observed that, through institutions like bill paying agencies, the settling of the bill does not necessarily involve the other acts of literacy which one might expect then to be performed (writing a check, and then performing all the literate acts that are involved in maintaining a checking account). Such a sequence of 1) universal constraint; 2) differentiated possible response, was observable on a variety of matters among those that had the deepest impact on the families' physical survival: their jobs, health, and education of their children. The existence of such sequences justifies statements such as 1) the broader social institutions of the community do not require much literacy for these families to function within the community; 2) all our families function at the required level. With such parameters set, we could then deal with the variability within our data as an aspect of the relative openness of a system which strongly encourages a kind of response but allows other responses, while making these more difficult and less rewarding.

Our findings are particularly secure when they deal with universal constraints and single types of responses. These should be considered as reliable as the great bulk of findings ever developed through ethnographic techniques. We also report on frequencies (e.g., "most of our families did not maintain a checking account"). This finding is suggestive of a pattern, and makes sense given the overall social constraints we observed. But the finding can obviously not be generalized as such. It cannot be stated as "most working class families...." We never intend such statements to be taken in this manner.

The value of ethnographic research thus lies in its efficiency for the identification of the kinds of things people have to deal with and the range of their ways of doing these things. It also lies in its ability to show in all its complexity what it is that some people actually do when they live a particular kind of life. Such pictures allow us to reach more processual models of human action incorporating both the constraining powers of the social environment, the kinds of struggle people go through as they perform what they are led to perform, and the extent of their success in reshaping the biography that is suggested to them. This value of ethnographic research is particularly well displayed in the communicational analysis of the homework scenes and then in the family portraits that contextualize these scenes and broaden the picture of the struggles of the families with their constraints. At this stage, it is central to keep in mind the facts of diversity and uncertainty: At the level of the continual accomplishment of everyday life, all informants are performing unique actions that have to be continually renewed in a slightly changed environment. This means that they can never be quite certain exactly how their interlocutor will respond to their statement, or what is going to happen to them in tomorrow's encounter.

But this emphasis on diversity and uncertainty, and continual creation

can only be a first step. These always new and diverse acts are in fact structured by the environment in which they have been performed through various feedback mechanisms that rarely allow for truly original "new" performances. Most performances, while new, are copies. The processes that lead to the production of such copies is what must interest us. This is why the model which we draw at the end of the section of findings, the model that we are using throughout this to present our data, is so fundamental.

CHAPTER THREE

LIVE CONVERSATIONS IN LITERATE SOCIETY:

AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF WORKING CLASS COMMUNICATION

Literacy, as a skill and as an experience, is rather universally, and common sensically, considered a central component of what makes modern societies what they are. From the political philosophers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the economists of industrial development of the twentieth, the theme of the centrality of literacy for modern life has been a dominant one. There cannot be democracy without literacy, we have always been told. Industrial development, revolutionary transformation, even civilization have been made dependent upon literacy. We have also been told that one only has a "literate society" when literacy is universal in a population, that is when all individuals possess the same kind of literacy. All this could be affirmed with the great moral authority that derives from, if not the truth of an argument, at least its overwhelming plausibility. After all, something which various measures make look like universal literacy did accompany advanced industrialization and popular democracy. What is not so obvious any more is the weight one must attribute to the association between literacy as so measured and the social events that constitute industrialization and democracy. To associate, say, industrialization with "universal" literacy is also to associate a property of the individual (the ability to read) with a property of a social system. This obviously has the effect of focusing our attention on the individual when talking about literacy. What starts as a sociological argument becomes a psychological one. What would happen, theoretically and analytically, if we tried to preserve the sociological insight and dealt with literacy, not as a property of individuals within a population, but rather as one of the means through which this population is organized into a social system? In this chapter we begin to illustrate the analytic yield of such a stance when applied to special characteristics of working class literacy.

As is usual, the discovery of literacy as a theoretical problem for the social sciences partially arose from a series of persistent practical problems which made it difficult simply to claim for literacy all the virtues it was ascribed during the first blush of enthusiasm. Within the past hundred years, all industrialized nations achieved universal literacy of a certain kind. Then progress seemed to slow if not to stop. Pockets of illiteracy persisted, certain types of people who, one generation earlier seemed easily to become literate suddenly failed; it proved more difficult than expected to make many non-western societies literate according to western standards, etc. Above all perhaps, it seems extremely difficult to make it happen for many people to go beyond an impoverished kind of "functional" literacy which allows them to read job application forms, driving tests or newspapers. From the point of view of democratic humanism, this is not "real" literacy. And yet, it seems to be the only literacy that our societies and their educational systems, as presently constituted, seem able to produce in large segments of the population. This is justification enough to postulate that something in industrialized societies, structures the literacy of their members to make it what, until now, it has been.

Given the plausibility of this stance, it may seem surprising that so little has been done to understand systematically how social forces organize the world people live in to lead them to certain kinds of literacy. With the exceptions of a few historical studies, a few psychological accounts focused on individual cognition, and many programmatic claims, there is indeed little literature on the social organization of literacy. There is almost nothing that

focuses in detail on the lives of a group of people to see reading in its social context. What is particularly lacking is a study of literacy as a means for the production of social life. The study on which we are reporting is an initial attempt to see reading as a social fact. It is geared to emphasize the ways literacy is limited by the conditions of this life, limits this life and offers certain kinds of opportunities.

This chapter focuses on one working class family living in the Bronx, New York, whom we call "the Farrells." At this stage, the eleven other families remain in the background but the data which we collected about them helped us place the Farrells within their broader community and understand the extent to which they are "typical" and the extent to which they are "unique."* We conducted around the Farrells the kind of "ethnography of literacy" which Szwed (1977) has called for. This meant getting an extensive knowledge of the biographies of the various people who could be considered part of the Farrells as a family, observing intensely their daily life, and interviewing them about what we could not observe. Throughout, we emphasized observations of their interaction with print. This had to be done to counter the fact that such interaction often is invisible both to the participants and to the observers (the latter, in particular, come from highly literate environments where literacy is taken for granted). But the ethnography was not simply an ethnography of literacy. To focus solely on literacy would have prevented us from seeing it in its context. The absence of literacy, for us, is as important as its presence. We prefer to describe our work as an ethnography of communication in which oral conversations are as central to an understanding of literacy as the written ones the participants also engage in. We did ask the question "who reads what, when and (in relation) with whom." But we also asked "who talks about what, when and with whom." Above all we asked: "what are the contraints on the choice of the conversational medium" and "what kinds of social relations are produced by these choices."

To give an initial answer to these questions is the goal of this chapter. What struck us, when we began to put together what we had learned about the Farrells, was the extent of their integration within the society that supported them. Not only have the Farrells a history of employment, Mr. Farrell as a truck driver, Mrs. Farrell as a secretary and a community organizer, but they are also able to take advantage of some of the opportunities available to them. Mr. Farrell engaged in union organization, Mrs. Farrell got an Associate of Arts degree through an experimental college for working class women. There she was radicalized, involved herself in community politics and started working to transform the ideological outlook of her husband and her rather conservative blue-collar, Irish, extended family. Sheila Farrell, their eleven year old

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*In Appendix A, we present a social and literacy profile of another family, the "Kinneys," to whom we refer at length in Chapter V. The Farrells and the Kinneys know each other in a distant sort of way. They live a few blocks from each other. Their children attend the same parochial school. Despite outward similarities in environment, the two families are extremely different. It is our intention to present analytic accounts and develop a theory of literacy that together preserve the possibility of such differences.

daughter is doing well in school. Mrs. Farrell has no difficulty supervising her homework. All these activities link these people to institutions external to the family. They also require that certain activities be performed through literacy: Mr. Farrell had to fill job application forms and to read various instruction manuals explaining the precautions he has to take when handling the dangerous chemicals he trucks about the country. Mrs. Farrell had to read to get her degree and to conduct her political activities. Sheila's school expects a great amount of reading from both her and at least one parent.

As pervasive as literacy is in the Farrell home, it is important to realize that these interactions-through-literacy hold a very specialized place in their routine. They only occur at certain times and only in relation to a few institutions. Most of their life is accomplished interactionally through other means. With each other, and with most of their peers, in the routine of their everyday life, they use conversations that are interactionally "live" (in the television sense). They do not interact and converse through "taped" (written) messages. Through these live conversations they achieve their life in a manner that makes it difficult for them to transform it. They may not be fully satisfied, but they are surviving "in the style to which they have been accustomed." They are "integrated" with each other, their community and the broader society in the sense that they have a place that is coherent with both their personal, familial structures and with the broadest of social (economic and political) structures. With these conversations, they make the normal, mundane, ordinary daily round of their lives and it appears successful enough that they rarely talk about how this round is organized and even more rarely about how it could be changed.

The chapter begins with two brief accounts of the Farrells, one focussing on details that normally appear in biographies, and one on details of their use of literacy. The level of details that we report is necessary because we want to emphasize the processual manner in which social and symbolic structures operate through individual action to produce the static states that are generally the only objects that sociological analyses report on. This will allow us to talk about structural possibilities as much as about structural constraints. It is particularly important to do this when talking about literacy as a specialized means for interaction. The second part of the chapter presents the analysis of the organization of the Farrell's life, first in purely "functional" terms and, second, in "symbolic" terms.

A. THE FARRELLS: FAMILY PROFILE

Of the Farrells, we mostly need to know some facts about their relationship with 1) the institutions that provide their livelihood, 2) the neighbors who have to handle the same daily pressures, 3) their kin. These three domains are certainly not separated for the Farrells. Their most significant kin all belong to the set of neighbors. Their economic fate is an overwhelming constraint on what it is that they can do with these kin and neighbors. We separate the three domains purely for heuristic reasons and with the intent of arriving at an integrated picture on which we rely for the analysis.

1) Relations with the marketplace

Mr. Farrell (32) is a truck driver. His wife (31) is, at present, a housewife at work taking care of their 2 children (Sheila, 10, and Maura, 1) and the household. They are able to pay the mortgage on a modest home in "Kingsland," known in New York City as a working class, ethnic neighborhood through which several generations of immigrants passed on their way from the "old country" to suburban Long Island. Both Farrells were born and raised in Kingsland. They aspire in a vague way for a move to the suburbs, but have not done anything concrete about it. Given what they feel they must spend to send Sheila to a Catholic parochial school, Mr. Farrell's salary of $15,000 barely succeeds in maintaining them where they are. Like all urban families, the Farrells are totally dependent on all the institutions and bureaucracies which regulate their access to basic survival goods (food, transportation, clothing and shelter, etc.), and their position does not allow much choice about their basic life style. The major areas in which such choice is possible, albeit to a small extent, lie in their relations with educational institutions. The Farrells can, practically, make a choice between the local public school and a parochial school.* They are able to pay the tuition for the latter, have been sending Sheila there since first grade, and intend to keep her there. But this choice is not without its financial consequences.

2) Relations with their neighbors

Kingsland could be talked about as a "community" in accordance with the usual American terminology and local usage. We must emphasize however the need to mute the key symbolic connotations of the word, particularly those that concern singularity and self-determination. Kingsland's geography provides distinctive boundaries that are used to define it in isolation from other Bronx neighborhoods. Its history also provides easy markers around which to construct the skeleton of a social organization. But one cannot let oneself be caught within the myth. Kingsland is New York City on the one hand and, on the other, a very miscellaneous group of individuals and families that have to deal with each because of their propinquity within the framework of categories and structures governed by the much broader society. These range from the geographical features which determine the placing of industrial parks or the routing of expressways, to the availability of a vocabulary of here vs. there with the strong symbolic connotations that "here" is us, where we want (an individualistic speech act) to be and that "there" is they who personally threaten us.

Given this framework, it is important to the Farrells and the people around them that they can be identified as "Irish," rather than Polish, Italian, Jewish, Black or Puerto Rican. This identification is expressed through self-descriptions, the displaying of special symbols at appropriate times and places (e.g., wearing green on St. Patrick's or decorating the bulletin board with shamrocks). In Kingsland, ethnicity is, above all, a way of talking about relationships with neighbors and the city. In this discourse, it is important

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*The school is described at greater length in Appendix A.

that Kingsland "was" an Irish community, is now a Polish one and is "threatened" into becoming a Black or Puerto Rican one. This story does cover a social history but more must not be read into it than the people themselves do, particularly on the subject of "cultural" difference between the groups and their interactional patterns. Some of the people themselves question the extent of their "differences" from other groups. They are not universally adverse to marrying across categories: one of Mrs. Farrell's brothers-in-law is Polish, another one is Italian, and a potential third is Puerto Rican. Mr. Farrell is known as "part-Lithuanian."

Of much more fundamental consequence is the political position which the Farrells have taken through Mrs. Farrell's political radicalization. This occurred through contacts with national and municipal events which entered Kingsland in various ways. She attended consciousness-raising groups sponsored by a nationally organized women's group. She got a CETA job as a community organizer and got an Associate's degree. She participated in a sit-in protesting the closing of a firehouse, got involved in school board elections, etc. Through all this she got a reputation as a "radical" in the neighborhood. But this involvement itself was not a total break from her neighbors. It should rather be understood as the performance of a possible, albeit rare, biography. She simply found herself in a type of relationship with her neighbors that had definite kinds of consequences, some of them not pleasant at all.

3) Relations with kin

The kind of consequences that Mrs. Farrell experienced may be best understood in terms of the impact her political action had on her kin. In spite of everything, the Farrells have remained one of the three strong pillars that support an active extended family life. The three pillars are the households of Mrs. Farrell's parents (in which three of her siblings still reside), the household of her sister Mary Janas and the Farrell's own. As can be seen from the accompanying chart (Figure 1), two other households are also involved but their role is more peripheral. These eighteen people meet regularly, they are in daily contact and form a tight network. Within this network, Mrs. Farrell, with her feminist and radical politics, positions which her husband supports, is the one that stands out while still remaining in the center. She is the butt of criticisms and often gets involved in heated political disputes. There is a place for her and the whole family conspire in her holding it.

The tightness of the family is maintained in part by propinquity and by the fact that all adults have achieved about the same kind of economic success: Mrs. Farrell's father is a chauffeur, Mr. Janas works in a meat factory and his wife is a part-time clerk. They also shared certain life experiences as adults. The women, for example, talk through whatever problems may arise in each of their households. Mrs. Cahill attended the college program with her daughter. For many practical purposes the Farrell-Cahill-Janas families are one functioning unit in which differences in personality or life style are transformed into differentiated role definitions. This is particularly relevant in relation to the literacy organization of the family since there are wide variations in personal performances. These do not cause major problems either to the family or to the individuals since at least some of the members have enough competence

SHEILA FARRELL'S SIGNIFICANT KIN

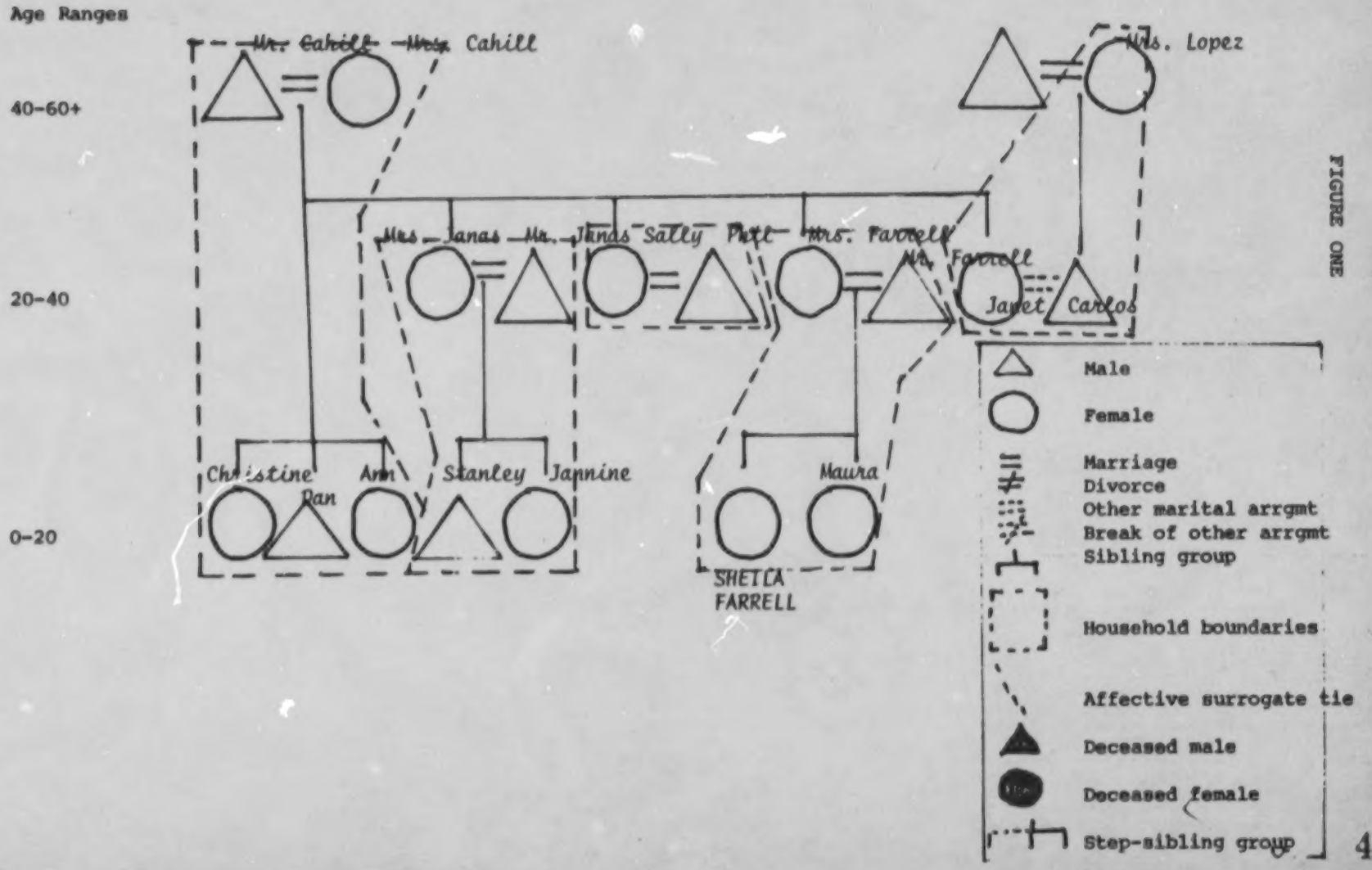

FIGURE ONE

to handle all the literacy that comes the family's way.

B. THE FARRELLS: A LITERACY PROFILE

The preceding profile tells us some of the things which we need to know. But it also hides a lot. In particular it hides the exact extent of the Farrell's literacy. The profile gives us only a preliminary impression of it. The ability to read and, to a lesser extent, to write, is implied in the fact that the people held jobs, went to school, decorated their homes with objects on which words were written, etc. But, without some specific ethnographic description, there is no way we can reconstruct what it is that the Farrells do with their literacy. To arrive at this description we, initially, made note of all the occasions when we observed the people reading or writing any type of messages or when we were specifically told that, to perform something, some reading or writing had been necessary. We then organized this list in terms of the primary functions of the performances within the life of the people. This led us to think in terms of six major categories of literacy: Literacy for use 1) in the marketplace, 2) in housework, 3) in communication within the social network, 4) in relations with the school, 5) in information gathering or entertainment, 6) in other, special situations.

1) Literacy for use in the marketplace

This includes all the literacy that is made necessary by the relationship of the people with those institutions the primary function of which is to regulate economic well-being. These are the institutions that give them jobs, distribute money, make them participate in city, state or federal activities, provide them with food, etc. All these institutions, from the trucking company which employs Mr. Farrell, to the bank on which his paycheck is drawn, to the various taxing agencies, to the supermarkets, etc., require the performance of some literacy. Mr. Farrell has to check his time-card and his paycheck. He had to prove that he could read the safety precautions to be taken in case of accident with his dangerous cargo. The Farrells have to pay bills which arrive at their home through the mail. They have to fill out tax forms and other such forms. Even shopping involves some reading not simply in order to recognize brandnames on the shelves, but also to use coupons printed in newspapers, to compare values, etc.

The Farrells, as a whole, can handle all this literacy that is imposed on them. It is how they actually do this that is interesting. They do not have a checking account and pay all their bills cash. To do this they use a special neighborhood check cashing place which has the effect of transforming what could have been a literate into a live conversation with the money-distribution institutions. When time comes to fill tax returns, the Farrells take all financial records for the year which Mrs. Farrell has saved in an envelope to the husband of a friend who fills the tax forms for the family in a long conversation with Mr. Farrell. Mrs. Farrell is completely responsible for all literacy tasks around shopping (since she is the one who actually does most of this shopping). She makes extensive use of coupons, makes lists of what she needs and tries to buy only what is cheaper that week. Interestingly she does not get

the paper in which most of the coupons are printed: She borrows a neighbor's paper and cuts out the coupons from it. She is often helped by Sheila on these tasks.

2) Literacy for housework

Mr. Farrell does some reading of "do-it-yourself" books to improve his considerable skills in small household repairs. Mrs. Farrell does some reading in order to improve her cooking. She wants to balance the family's diet (by counting calories through information gained in charts and books) and to make it more diverse (by reading recipes from cards, magazines, cookbooks and some that were given her by friends). Sheila herself does little cooking but has occasionally baked cakes from instructions written on a box of mix.

3) Literacy and the social network

As mentioned earlier, the Farrells are at the center of an extensive network of kin, friends and acquaintances. Here again, Mrs. Farrell is at the heart of the required literacy. She opens the family's mail (mostly advertisements, flyers about local events, pamphlets--many of these things coming to her through her political involvement), sorts it and decides what is to be thrown out and what is to be communicated to the rest of the family. This is done either by talking about it or simply by posting it on the bulletin board where it will be seen both by members of her household and by the many kin who go through it. There is very little personal mail, little enough in fact for the one or two cases to stand out in the family's memory. Most of what comes into the house are greeting cards exchanged within the extended family around ritual holidays. As far as the Farrells are concerned there is no need to correspond since all their kin is within easy reach for face to face conversation. It is striking that Mrs. Farrell, after the baby destroyed her address book, felt no need to reconstitute one for a long time: She knew by heart all the telephone numbers she needed.

Given all this it may seem surprising that the Farrells do use internal notes, reminders and messages. They are in fact mostly of a special kind. Here again there is a clear asymmetry: Mrs. Farrell is the one who generates most of the writing, her husband and daughter are more typically the addressee. Mrs. Farrell sometimes writes notes to herself about matters she wants to raise with her husband, writes him "little romantic notes" since, she says, she finds it easier to express emotions and feelings through writing. Mr. Farrell too will write notes to make up after major quarrels to tell her how much he loves her. Sheila writes notes when she is in trouble, to say she is sorry or to argue that a punishment should now be revoked. This suggests that literacy, for the Farrells, has a particular power that goes beyond the purely pragmatic. It seems, above all, to be a sacred medium, to be used for ritual purposes and in situations of interactional danger.

4) Literacy and the School

Sheila, by all accounts, is doing well in her school, particularly in reading. Mrs. Farrell is easily able to supervise her homework and to help Sheila when she hesitates or is making a mistake. Mr. Farrell's competence is less visible. He seems to have been assigned the role of "he-who-does-not-know" and accepts it. This does not mean that everybody is relaxed about Sheila's performance. They await report cards to decide whether Sheila is or is not performing well and are "very bothered" if the grades are average or mediocre. Mrs. Farrell does not always agree with the teachers' grading and she is not fully satisfied with the school. She has accepted the idea that Sheila is "only average" and not a "gifted child." There is some tension around this between Mrs. Farrell and her sister whose child goes to the same school. Mrs. Janas is known for being always ready to go to the school and complain about the way her daughter is treated. There is also some tension between the sisters on the subject of the kind and amount of help that the children should receive to make them more successful in school. They do not always agree on the books the children should read, the films they should see, or the extent of help to extend around homework, etc. But the tension, in this case, should be understood as reflecting a constant, intensive interaction between the sisters on the subject of their children's school education. They are concerned, and talk about it a lot. Yet, despite all the concern and time devoted to the school, the parental literacy involved in all this is, paradoxically perhaps, rather limited. Besides reading report cards, notices, and the children's homework as they check it, little is required and little is performed. Furthermore very few of the skills the children are learning (and the mothers are practicing through their supervision) is of direct use in any other family activity--except the homework itself of course. It is clear also, that the absent fathers are not missed in any practical sense. The school, like shopping, is the women's territory.

5) Literacy for information and entertainment

Books of any type are rarely read by any of the Farrells. When she was a college student Mrs. Farrell did read extensively and conscientiously. She keeps from this time a strong feeling that reading books is important and she encourages it--with no great success. When she reads now, it is mostly by writers of "sensational" fiction like Harold Robbins. She says that, even though she knows such books are supposed to be trash, she enjoys them because they are so "true-to-life." Sheila only reads books on which she has to write reports for school. When Mr. Farrell reads it is mostly science-fiction, horror and monster stories.

The Farrells do not read regularly any newspapers though the New York Post and the Daily News find their way into the home. Mrs. Farrell insists that she "hates" the News. She is, however, well acquainted with its format. She can describe in detail how she reads the paper starting with the middle section and the "Inquiring Photographer," moving on to Ann Landers and then successively to "Your Doctor," "The Stars," and "Ask Katy about Your Dreams." Finally she reads the headline story and skims the articles on the first five pages. Mr. Farrell also reads the News when it is in the house. Both of them also occasionally read the local paper which is given them by a neighbor.

Occasionally Mrs. Farrell buys magazines like Readers Digest or Redbook. She also has a lot of baby magazines delivered to her free since Maura was born. She had a subscription to Time for a year, but found it very boring.

While we did not try to measure the exact amount of readings of this type that the Farrells do, it is certain that they do very little by comparison to what we might hope a literate family would do. Given what surveys of reading habits have found, it seems in any event that the Farrells are within the range of the norm. Reading is not entertainment. Most of the information that they really want is gotten from conversations with their kin and neighbors. What they could only get from reading (information about current political or artistic events, for example) does not interest them much. What they seem to need enough to make them read newspapers are suggestions for interpretations of events in their lives (thus the success of someone like Ann Landers) plus the bare descriptions of events (such as accidents, crimes) that might happen to them and can become the subject of conversations.

6) Literacy for special purposes

As practicing Catholics, the Farrells have to deal with the rather limited but not inexistent literacy which the Church requires of the faithful. This minimal literacy, however, is directly related to an institutional life and does not carry into the home except through the few words that may sometimes be written on religious artifacts which may be displayed. This makes Mrs. Farrell's political activity the sole source of an extra-ordinary display of literacy. During her active period Mrs. Farrell had to read the local paper, stay acquainted with events in the neighborhood, read pamphlets, write them, etc. All this demanded an intensive use of her literacy skills and she was equal to the challenge. But with the birth of her new child, her political activity has slowed and so have all the literacy performances that accompanied it.

C. THE STRUCTURING OF LITERACY USE

We have offered a thumbnail sketch of the Farrells as both exotic and commonplace, both powerful and entrapped, and both literate and primarily conversational. We must now develop an argument to justify the way the description proceeded. In other words, "so what?"

Obviously, the Farrells are unique. However commonplace any detail of their biography may be, the overall pattern cannot be generalized to any other family. Our analysis cannot consist of the attribution of a probability to some trait recognizable among the Farrells. Truck driving, A.A. degrees, dominance of women in literacy activities, political involvement and a child doing well in a parochial school, are traits found together among the Farrells, but there is no way we can assign a probability to their association.* We

*In fact the Farrells, like most of the other 11 families in our sample, correspond rather closely to the families Bott (1971) or Bernstein (1971)

cannot find out which, among the traits, is the one which gove[illegible] the presence of the others. Our analysis proceeds along different lines. We do stress properties of constraints which we know to have a widespread impact in our society (the organization of the distribution of economic means, for example, or the organization of education) through an examination of the kinds of responses the Farrells make to them and of the consequences of these responses. Thus, for example, the fact that Mr. Farrell is paid by check obliges him to deal with the minimal literacy of reading it to find out whether it is accurate. This reading does not in fact have to be accomplished by him personally, but by someone within his network who can and will do it for him. Once this is done, Mr. Farrell could deposit the check in a checking account. This would require somewhat more literacy performances. Here again, it is not so much he who absolutely would have to do them. The account could be managed by his wife. From all we know about her, she could (in terms of pure abstract competence) manage a checking account. But she does not feel the need for it. Check cashing agencies and the Post Office are all the Farrells absolutely need and they have access to them.

It should also be mentioned that this analysis of possibilities and constraints is not oriented to finding why it is that the Farrells, personally, have chosen one route rather than another. It is enough for us to identify the routes that they can take and the consequences which taking any of the routes may have. Mrs. Farrell's political radicalization, for example, is not interesting to us for what it suggests about her as a person. It is interesting because it reveals one inherent possibility for action within a certain level of literacy and because it highlights the price to be paid in taking up this possibility. For Mrs. Farrell to become radicalized through readings associated with advanced education is evidence that literacy can perform what is often claimed to be its most noble function: giving access to new worlds and to the ability to think for oneself in a broader framework than is made available in the most local community. Mrs. Farrell and her mother were both exposed to such literacy. It seems to have made Mrs. Cahill somewhat more open, but, from all accounts, her personal outlook was not transformed. For Mrs. Farrell, on the other hand, the experience was a profound one which changed her life. It led her into direct practical action, and it had the consequence of making her a target of much criticism from the neighborhood politicians. The criticisms meted by her neighbors could have led her to move on to high ground (intellectually, if not socially). She could have taken her concerns to a four-year college. Some of the women in the large group we studied followed a similar route to hers and ended with Social Work degrees. Mrs. Farrell may indeed achieve something like this in the future. Her life did not stop with the end of our fieldwork. But such a journey would not be an easy one in more ways than one. One can understand that Mrs. Farrell would fear the breakdown of the relations existing between her, her husband and her kin, all of whom are

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have been talking about. We differ with them insofar as we believe that the probabilistic correlation that can be established between the organization of social networks, communicational structures and social classes are an analytic problem to be solved rather than a resolved fact to be filed away as established knowledge.

dependent upon her remaining more or less where she is. Without any significant "pull" from the outside, she may not see any clear advantage to the alternative that would be intellectually easy for her to choose.

Even such a brief consideration of Mrs. Farrell's possible motivations can alert us to the fact that, whatever she may do, the possibilities, the constraints, the determination of the social price she would have to pay, are all aspects of the social forces which constitute the social position she is holding. The same forces organize the kinds of literacy she must use. They give her the means to do much more than the minimum. They also determine the price that may have to be paid when this is done. Not to have a bank account while transforming a reading of Mao into a sit-in protest over the closing of a local firehouse, the minimal in literacy use along with the maximal, are both to be understood in social terms. What we must now do is try to understand the working of these structures and the place which literacy plays in the process. We do this in two steps. First we look at what we refer to, for lack of a better term, as "functional" constraints. These are constraints which are the direct product of the technological and economic processes through which our society operates. Second we look at what we refer to as "symbolic" constraints. These are the constraints which are produced by the fact that human beings, as they live and communicate, always further elaborate what is strictly necessary for them to do in order to survive. These further elaborations are partially ideational, partially ritual. They are, above all, the product of the symbolic nature of human communicational systems.

The distinction between the "functional" and the "symbolic" partially covers the Marxist distinction between the infra- and the super-structural. We want to make it clear however that we do not consider the symbolic as in any way strictly <u>determined</u> by the functional. The symbolic has to allow people <u>to handle</u> the functional. This can be done in many different and still very practical, concrete ways. Our distinction also partially covers the Parsonian distinction of the "social" from the "cultural." In relation to this, we want to emphasize that the symbolic is a <u>social</u> (rather than psychological) structure that is practically acted out in what people do. In other words, for us, the functional is not distinguished from the cultural as "what people do" vs. "what people say." People say and do both their functional and symbolic constraints. Given this position, one might wonder why we feel the need to separate the functional from the symbolic. Here again, we believe that a heuristic distinction can help us to sketch more sharply the various properties of what people have to deal with. The analytic yield is worth the danger of distortion.

1) <u>Functional constraints</u>

As should be clear by now, it is fundamental to us that the structuring of literacy cannot be separated from the structuring of society. The need for (some) people to be literate (at some level) is a fundamental condition for the existence of our society as presently constituted. Our society cannot function if, at some strategic points, some literacy acts are not performed. Money is not simply "paper"; it is <u>printed</u> paper. It is fundamental that a check is <u>written</u>. All economic exchanges in our societies are based on a

literacy act. What is not so obvious is the implications of these remarks for personal (rather than societal) literacy. The only functional prescription is that certain types of literacy acts be performed, by certain people at certain times. There is no need for all persons to perform all types of literacy. On the contrary perhaps: the simplicity of the economic interactions between workers and the institutions that distribute the money that is allotted to them requires altogether very little personal literacy. More literacy can threaten the system so that use of higher literacy gets punished.

Minimal literacy is of course probably only sufficient for the lowest types of occupations.* It is well known that most working class occupations, when they involve the handling of complex machinery and industrial processes, require the ability to read more complex texts than bills or checks. Mr. Farrell had to read driver's license tests, and all sorts of texts concerned with the maintenance of trucks, the handling of dangerous chemicals, road signs, etc. It was also within his reach to get the training to become a foreman, which would involve even more technical literacy. But all this is finally intellectually less formidable than it may sound, particularly when looked at from an interactional point of view. Most of the reading associated with Mr. Farrell's job are of material that has to be read only a very few times. Later, he could rely on an acquired status or on memory. He only had to take the driver's license test once. Whatever repairs he has learned to make on his truck, he does not need to read anything more to make them. Most importantly, there is no indication that he needs to perform any extensive literacy act to relate to the people he deals with on the job. He certainly does not have to relate to his peers through literacy. In his relations with his boss the only literacy required is the minimal ones having to do with time cards, forms and checks. All other relating is done orally, through face to face conversations that are immediately "live."

The same things can be said of all the other Farrells' relation to the marketplace. All of the literacy that is required by the various jobs or tasks they perform, whether on the job, in the supermarket, or at home, is to be performed in passing. Like the literacy involved in picking a brand from a supermarket shelf, using coupons and money to pay for it, all the practical literacy the people have to perform can be encompassed within an oral conversation that can remain the dominant channel of communication. As we know, this minimally necessary and sufficient literacy does not preclude other forms of literacy. All the Farrells can do more than the minimum. Generally there is no structural pressure for them to use an advanced literacy. At any given time, they may in fact be called to do more; new tests, for example, are a constant threat to the working person. Mr. Farrell's brief chemical training is a case in point. But certainly, there is no pressure, in particular, for them to

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*As some have noted, the minimal required literacy can be of a radically different cognitive type than the more elaborated one. A minimal literacy, even in an urban, industrialized environment, can be purely contextual and/or ideographical. All people need is the ability to recognize written signs as wholes. Most "illiterates" in our society can handle money, street signs, shop names, subway directions, etc. What they cannot do is decode new texts.

relate among themselves through literacy. All the significant Farrells and their neighbors are within "voice" distance. It seems even that the ability to talk with a person is the condition of their continuing to interact regularly. Among themselves, the dominant channel for communication is through conversations that are either immediately "live" in the sense that the people can see each other (or will see each other soon). This life of live conversations is very rich and complex. These conversations are more than sufficient to accomplish all the interactional work needed to maintain relationships. Whatever happens to the Farrells, whatever they need each other to do for them, can be told, explained, asked for, disagreed with, regulated, through face to face conversations.

The Farrells are not interactionally deprived because of the primordiality of live conversations in their interactions. The world outside does not require anything that they are not doing. In fact this world is rather punishing of their efforts to use literacy to do more than hold the jobs they have. The world inside is satisfying at least as far as literacy is concerned: none of the tensions that exist among the Farrells or between them and their kin have little directly to do with the literacy which they do not use. These tensions do not provide any incentive for more literacy. In fact, given the differentiation with the family as far as literacy roles are concerned, it is probable that the pressure is towards less literacy since too great a discrepancy might break the conversations. Mr. Farrell, for example, goes as far as to support his wife in the ideological conversations that they have with their kin. He agrees with the attempts at reorganizing roles. But he did not join her in her political activities outside the home. It is doubtful that he could follow her very far if she pursued a career founded on higher education and higher literacy. External structuring processes and internal ones are thus in essential agreement and push the family in the same direction.

Looking back at our account of the Farrells' literacy, it is also obvious that they perform more literate acts than the basic ones which are required of them. Not only did Mrs. Farrell read sociology and psychology textbooks, she, and her husband and kin read newspapers, some magazines and books. They read and write greeting cards, notes and reminders, etc. When looked at in the context of the eleven other families about whom we learned something, they place in some middle range. In some of these other families most members performed little more than the required minimum They could read money and bills. They could handle forms and taxes (given that they knew who could fill them for them). But they never read books, wrote notes to each other, got involved in politics. Some of their children were doing very badly in school. In some other families, several members were gaining graduate degrees; there was extensive reading from a large library, etc. This is the kind of data which suggests to us that the social position of these families, while they constrain what it is that they can easily do without being immediately punished for it, does not absolutely determine these actions. It seems on the contrary that literacy does have some of the powers that have been traditionlly ascribed to it. It can liberate people, it can make others jump across the boundary between the working and middle classes. But these fates themselves are not purely dependent on one's personal activity. To use literacy in any way has immediate consequences which people must handle. These consequences can either, through a process of negative feedback, lead the people back to the position they held

earlier, or, through a process of positive feedback, break the old system into which they were integrated into and lead them into new social relationships. The Farrells, for whatever reason, are essentially back to where they were before Mrs. Farrell got involved with higher literacy. But one possibility for escape is with them, through their access to this higher literacy.

2) Symbolic Constraints

A functional analysis does not exhaust all we can say about the use the Farrells in fact make of their literacy. In particular, it cannot explain the exact place where we can see them use more literacy than the minimum and in a way for which they are rewarded rather than punished. Leaving aside Mrs. Farrell's temporary involvement in literacy-for-politics, the Farrells go beyond the types of literacy performances that are immediately embedded within live conversations in three main circumstances. Above all, they handle school-related literacy. (We are not saying anything here about their success there. We are simply emphasizing that "school" is something that they all do.). They also exchange greeting cards. And they write each other notes, particularly to express their love, to apologize, to plead, etc. We now want to argue that these kinds of use of literacy are elaborations of functional constraints, made possible by certain properties of these constraints transformed as they have become parts of symbolic communicational systems. In order to clarify the argument we first look at the manner in which the Farrells elaborate what is given to them. We then look at the place of school literacy as symbolic elaboration within the broader society.

The exchange of greeting cards may seem like a most superficial elaboration. It seems rather surprising that a family that is so intimately tied in continuous face to face interaction should bother to send each other greeting cards. Wouldn't a telephone call do just as well? In fact, it does not seem that cards ever replace calls or even live greetings. The cards are "something more" that has to be performed.

There is something not quite "superficial" in the fact that literacy artifacts (greeting cards) are used to mark ritual moments in the year or passages within the life of related individuals. No human society lets such moments and passages go by without ritual performances. These performances are always shaped by the general orientation of the culture. It is no accident that, in a civilization "of the Book," all ritual performances, whether religious, political or personal should involve some literacy. That this literacy should appear to be "merely symbolic" is precisely the point. The literacy is there to be celebrated, it is not there to be practically useful at this stage.

The same analysis must be made of the exchange of the "I-am-sorry" notes. It is probable that the Farrells, like most of us, find it very difficult to pronounce orally certain of the most pregnant words and phrases which our culture offers them. "I am sorry" or "I love you," particularly when one "means" these phrases, are extremely powerful statements. To play on a central theme in Mary Douglas's work, their purity is what makes them dangerous (1966). One does not play with such statements, one writes them. Precisely because writing is a sacred mode, it is particularly appropriate to say sacred things in writing.

But this should not be taken to mean that the Farrells cannot express their feelings. They already know what the others will write. The purely informational aspect of the communicational act has already been performed when the writing is done, but without the writing it is as if the movement from one state to another in the short-run relationship of the people cannot be accomplished. It is in this way that the "merely symbolic" becomes the absolutely vital interactional act.*

The case of school literacy is more complex. But it too must be seen as "absolutely vital" because it is "merely symbolic." The functional incoherence which makes one suspect the need for a symbolic analysis is one that only becomes apparent when we put together several features of the situation. As may have remained implicit until now, it is clear to us that Sheila is totally integrated within the literacy of the family. We have seen her helping her mother with shopping and cooking, reading comic books and television captions, writing apologetic notes, etc. The familial literacy which she does not perform (paying bills, reading newspapers) is the literacy that does not concern her. She does not need the information and it is not required that she have it. What she does do is interactionally sufficient while remaining minimal from the school's point of view. It is probably already sufficient for her to perform most of the positions that it will be easier for her to enter when she comes of age. With her present literacy, perhaps improved by some repetitive practice, she can perform more than adequately as a factory worker, a waitress, a cashier or a bank clerk. Only minimal technical training would be necessary to transform her into a secretary and other such "pink collar" occupations.

Neither the school nor the Farrells consider sufficient the literacy which allows Sheila to function. At the same time, neither expect Sheila ever to use most of what she is learning. All the Farrells, including Sheila, are concerned with Sheila's performance in school, and they are ready to do certain things supposed to improve this performance. They help by spending much money to send her to a parochial school, talking to the teachers, complaining, helping Sheila with her homework, and engaging her in activities specifically designed to improve her school performance. All these things can be done with various degrees of urgency (Mrs. Farrell was criticized by her sister for being too relaxed). What is not so clear is why they should be interested, given Sheila's present competence, the fact that it is already sufficient to her survival in the market place, and the difficulties of financing and arranging her education beyond what is necessary for survival. The Farrells themselves, when asked, would state the expectable: it is only if Sheila is evaluated by the school, and in its terms, that she can get into a "good" high school, college, graduate school and/or a middle class occupation. Strictly speaking, this is true in a practical sense. For the Farrells the only possible route into a successful and emancipated life is through school-measured success. But we also know that most of what is taught in school is not functionally determined by the needs of most middle class occupations. Businesses are well-known for saying, only half-jokingly,

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*It is probable that the Farrells' use of "I-am-sorry" notes was introduced by their participation in a "marriage encounter" weekend organized by the Catholic Church. "Writing to one's spouse" is a central theme of the process.

that the first thing they have to do when hiring college graduates is "un-teach" them what they learned in college. Ideally, in fact, most of what is included in school curricula is more oriented towards the formation of a liberal humanist than the programming of a human computer to be fitted in a particular position.

The Farrells know all this in a vague way and can even articulate such a stand, but it does not produce in them any revolt against the school as a social institution. The school, for them remains a practical means, which it is. It also remains the institution which sanctions their place and justifies their (lack of) success. Because Sheila does not get very good grades, and because she does not seem too taken by books and other school tasks, we were told by Mrs. Farrell that she knows that Sheila "is not a gifted child," that "she won't go very far" and that "her hope is in the baby." Mr. Farrell told us that Sheila was "like him" ("more interested in athletics than academics"), more interested in tasks involving manual manipulation than in those involving literacy. This last evaluation is not quite true since Sheila is more like her mother as far as her competence in functional literacy in the home is concerned. But what is important here is that it is the school, through its tests, that provides the eventual justification for such evaluation. It is the school that transforms formally whatever it is that Sheila does, or "is" for her family, into a statement that can practically channel her into a certain biography and make another one all but impossible.

This evaluative role of the school makes it the central gate-keeping institution. Whatever children do or learn at home, however much they know in relation to what they may have to do when they grow up, the school must give them a grade that is intended to be used as symbolic justification for the fate of the children. It is only in symbolic terms that we can understand this role of the school that is practical without being strictly determined by the functional requirement of the society. We cannot here explore in any detail why the school should be such a symbolic gate-keeper, or what it does concretely to manifest that it is indeed performing this role appropriately. We would have to go into such matters as individualism, meritocracy, universalism, the psychic unity of mankind and the fairness of testing procedures. It might have appeared that, when dealing with the Farrells' practical life in an ordinary neighborhood of New York City, we were far from such broad ideological matters. We could not in fact have been any closer.*

D. THE SOCIO-SYMBOLIC CONSTITUTION OF WORKING CLASS LIVES

The above analysis is necessarily sketchy. It relies as much on the recent literature in the sociology of education as it does on a purely

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*This analysis owes much to Bourdieu and Passeron's argument in Reproduction (1978). It should be noted however that its pessimistic tone should be mitigated by the consideration of the fact that the school, as symbolically constituted, contains within itself the seeds of the transformation of our society. The school does give students some tools which, while not being immediately functional, allow them to transform their consciousness.

empirical analysis of the Farrells. The results of the analysis are indirectly corroborated by the fact that a communicational analysis of two videotaped homework scenes led to essentially similar conclusions. Final corroboration will depend however on a more detailed comparative analysis of many more working or middle class families. Only then will it be possible to specify the place of literacy in the play of constraints and possibilities organizing lives and differentiating them across classes and across families. What we have done here is more in the nature of an illustration of what there is to learn about a modern society through a look at the organization of the people's literacy. As we conclude, we would like to emphasize again the central features of our analysis which we consider most central.

It is central to us that the analysis is ethnographic. Not only does ethnography allow one to be surprised about what people do in the world, not only does it allow the researcher to collect a lot of details about the people's lives that are essential to contextualize what it is that they do, but it confronts the observer with the direct experience of the uncertain quality of the people's lives, the fact that they must continually improvise as the unexpected happens. Traditional ethnography often missed this processual aspect of life as it adopted a static vocabulary of description of customs and structures. The ethnomethodological revolution in ethnography has finally given us the means to go beyond a statism which until then was more often deplored than overcome. But ethnomethodology can go too far if it focuses solely on uncertainty, improvisation and the continuous creation of the social world. Improvisation is never absolute. It is always molded by the conditions that made it necessary to improvise and by the responses to what has been created. The Farrells, every night, have to improvise a homework scene. But the school always strongly frames what they can do during homework and it feeds back an interpretation of the scene--through Sheila's grades and other evaluations--that they cannot control.

Social life, then, is something that people do practically in the linear progression of time. Certain things happen first and others happen second. It is in the temporal gap between the first and the second stage that uncertainty enters. It is in the fact that the first action has occurred that the second one is socially constrained. Given certain initial situations certain things become extremely difficult to achieve, if not impossible. Given the kind of occupations the Farrells have, given the organization of the school, given the overall economic situation of the nation, it is evident that it would be extremely difficult for the Farrells to be very different from what we saw them as being. Given minor changes in the economic situation, Mr. Farrell may suddenly make enough money for the family to make the move to the suburbs which many of their peers have accomplished. Given a big effort by Mrs. Farrell, she may get enough education to move through another route. But the interactional risks are already greater and the benefits hard to predict. As for the political action which she engaged in for a while, only an extraordinary set of circumstances might allow her to transform radically her life.

We could similarly analyze the relative consequences of the various biographies any of the other Farrells can possibly create for themselves in the future. We do not have the data to outline these biographies, if only because they are still to be accomplished and much can happen. Retrospectively,

however, the presence of the constraints on improvised creation can explain the statistical differentiation of typical biographies across classes. If a "class" is understood less as a group of persons than as a set of differentiated constraints, then we can understand why it is that there is a statistical tendency for the people who have to live with these constraints to achieve similar lives. It is not so much that they "are" the same as it is that they have to react to the same things. Far from being the same, we saw that they can elaborate their required literacy to do things that go much beyond the expected. But the limits are soon reached, beyond which any further elaboration becomes extremely onerous.

All this applied equally to functional and symbolic constraints. The symbolic, too, has to be practically performed. The symbolic order also constrains what is said and done rather than determines it absolutely. In fact, the symbolic is not, within the total life of the people a separate domain that they can distinguish from the purely functional. The consequences of symbolic action are just as practically real as the consequences of functional action. Strictly speaking, the people could not actually "function" if they did not perform appropriate, coherent actions. The need to distinguish heuristically between the two sets of constraints comes from the act that what we have referred to as "functional" and "symbolic" constraints operate processually in different manners and must be separated to be understood (in the same manner as a full theory of action has to separate geographical constraints from the technological ones that transform what can be done about the former without obliterating them).

It may seem that these conclusions have taken us rather far from literacy. In fact, they have not. For us, literacy, as a communicational event, is necessarily a social event. As Dewey wrote, "society exists in communication" (1916:5). The social and the communicational, the industrial and the literate are, for all intents and purposes, the same concepts. We cannot talk about literacy without talking about social organization. But we cannot talk either about social organization, in our societies, without talking about literacy. Communication through literacy, both functionally and symbolically, is placed at strategic places within the network of necessary actions which constitute our societies.

The social requirements represent a set of actions that some of us, or all of us, have to perform at one time or another. They also frame any action that we might possibly perform at the time when something is expected of us. In our world, a child who does not attend school is not someone freed from the constraints of society. This child is a "truant." His acts have been interpreted by the school, in terms of the school and the consequences which he has to pay for his truancy are themselves defined scholastically. A truant "fails to gain an education." His acts are coherent. He has done something the school knows about and is ready to sanction. But such a case also emphasizes the "externality" of the social requirements. We might say that the requirements are more in the nature of the feedback action one receives after acting than in the nature of the action itself one has initially performed. The Farrells have constraints to handle. And whatever it is that they do has consequences. But they are not completely controlled. On the other hand, the absence of incentives to perform something can itself be very restrictive if only because something that is not practiced regularly and redundantly is soon lost. Children learn

language not simply because of an innate ability to do so, but also because language is overwhelmingly necessary for interaction in the human species. So it will be practiced and one's competence can soon rival that of one's elders. Children also have a capacity to learn to read. Whether this capacity will in fact be triggered depends on the extent to which they find it useful in interaction. For the Farrells, literacy is something that they only need for schooling purposes and, to the extent that they are in school, they use their literacy and become relatively competent. Outside of school, however, things change. Literacy becomes useless and they do not practice it much anymore. Neither job nor family require much literacy. Neither job nor family actually prevents literacy from being used. But the whole impetus for the use must come from the individuals. By comparison to all the other constraints and possibilities, this impetus must be weak. As for Sheila, she is doing well in school. But one suspects that the further she advances in school literacy, the less this literacy will be relevant to what she is doing at home, the furthest she will find herself from the rest of the family and the more difficult it will be for her to continue on the road to higher education. This will become all the more difficult since, as she progresses, she will find herself in more and more direct competition with people who have abundantly practiced the skills now necessary and can outperform her. The difference does not have to be huge. A few points difference can make all the difference in the test administered for entry into the better schools and colleges. She might make it. But the effort she will have to make will be incommensurately greater than the effort a peer from a different family might have to make to achieve the same thing.

CHAPTER FOUR

A CHILD'S PLACE

In the preceding chapter, we provided a general outline of one family's history and then of the forces which constrain the progression of this history. In the process we began to indicate in what manner the members of the family differentiated each other along a variety of lines. We mentioned differences in outlook between the Cahills, the Janases and the Farrells. We mentioned the division of literacy labors between Mr. and Mrs. Farrell. And we began to stress that whatever can be said to make the Farrells what they are, the process of this making is not a mechanical event. The Farrells are not directly controlled. They must act out responses to conditions. To this response, still another response will be given by other people and institutions (and so on). This response to their response may itself be produced by the constraining institution in its own terms rather than in the terms that the Farrells might have suggested. And in so doing, their own input may become utterly irrelevant. It remains that the historical sequencing of their response gives them a modicum of "freedom." From the point of view of the constraining agencies this freedom represents a modicum of uncertainty about the exact response given by the family to its input. It may also represent the "irrelevant," i.e., features of the family's behavior that it does not need to control as long as the overall action is indeed performed. Of course, one institution's irrelevance may be another institution's uncompromising requirement (we could think of many examples when comparing the requirements of jobs and schools). It remains, that, in the interstices between the requirements of external institutions, families can create something that is highly idiosyncratic.

This idiosyncrasy reveals itself in many different ways. It reveals itself in special forms of labor division, in political action, in the notes that the people write each other, etc. As we proceed with this work, one of our goals is to arrive at more sharply etched structural descriptions of the idiosyncratic patterning of the Farrells as an interactional unit. But it must be reaffirmed that the Farrells' idiosyncratic communication structure is itself, from the point of view of each of them, an achievement in differentiation. It is an achievement, in the sense that each member, continually must act out in the context of familial feedback, but in the absence of any direct, mechanical control over this activity. Furthermore this activity is differentiated by the very communicational structure of which it is a part. The father does not do what the mother does; Sheila does not do what her parents are doing. Each, in their personal activity, are constrained by the position which is assigned to them by the response which the others make to their activity. Together they produce something that is patterned, and we can see them, in their various positions, holding the other accountable for performing appropriately. In that sense they are one system. But this cannot be meant to imply that they all have the same vision of the system since they are seeing it from different perspectives. Whatever mechanisms reproduce the familial structure over time and in new settings, this structure can thus not reside in personality characteristics which all members of the family would share. This makes our central problem--the account of how a family background can help or hinder a child's success--less straightforward than it might seem. A child's acquisition of the family's literacy is not simply a product of his internalizing a personality structure widely available within the family and helpful for school success. This acquisition must be seen as the product of the position in which the child is placed, however unique it must necessarily be within the family.

What we do in this chapter is illustrate the specific place of Sheila Farrell within her family's literacy to emphasize the uniqueness and specificity of her position in contrast to that of her partners. Through this analysis we set the theoretical stage for the analysis of one homework scene among the Farrells in contrast to another homework scene among the Kinneys. Before doing this, we want to provide more details about Sheila Farrell's life within her family. Second, we want to establish the need for an analysis of familial processes that is not as mechanical as many such analyses more or less wittingly end up being. This should lay the foundation for the theoretical account which we offer as the contribution of this study to the developing work on the influence of the family on the education of their children.

To search for Sheila's place within her family's literacy, it is first necessary to mention the occasions during which she is not involved except as spectator. After we discuss briefly the nature of these occasions and their organization, we proceed to a more extensive analysis of familial literacy activities to which Sheila is expected to respond in some other fashion than as a passive audience. This analysis is organized around two striking events within the family: a calendar with short biographies of prominent Black Americans and a prominent bulletin board.

A. FAMILY LITERACY THAT DOES NOT INVOLVE SHEILA

There is little that is strikingly surprising in the list of literacy activities to which Sheila is little more than an audience, if she is in the house at all. She does not participate much in the handling of money. She does not read the newspapers and is not expected to participate in conversations about anything that was printed there (by contrast, the adults hold each other accountable for having done such readings). As we can see in the episode which we discuss next, she is not expected to participate in a medical discussion about the proper medicine to give her baby sister. But its lack of surprising qualities does not make this list uninteresting if we look at it for what it reveals about the ordering of the relationships between Sheila and her parents. It is not simply that this list is much more unique than it may seem. In one instance, a grandmother from our larger sample asked a six year old to go to the medicine cabinet, pick up a specific medicine (thereby relying on some capacity to read labels) and give a dose of it to her brother. Not surprisingly, the child got the wrong medicine and the brother got sick.

This is enough to suggest how the absence of Sheila from the medicine scene is not, in any simple way, a product of her absolute incompetence in the area. For other parents, in other situations, it might be rational to rely on a child to handle money, medicine and other such externally controlled institutional matters. As Margaret Mead liked to say, in situations of rapid culture change, a child may be attributed an "adult" role because of his relative competence. Similarly, we must consider Sheila's (in-)competence to be the product of her mother's construction of their relative competence. In another vain, it is interesting that the Farrells do not do much of what another study of literacy use (Taylor, forthcoming) found some families were extensively doing, namely, communicating with their children through note writings about immediate matters: the Farrells were never observed to leave Sheila notes taped to the refrigerator

door of the kind, "I'll be back at six. Do not forget your violin lesson. Love. Mom."

We mentioned earlier the absence of such communicational sequences to make our point about the Farrells' reliance on "live" conversational channels. Here, we want to emphasize that, from Sheila's point of view, there is something radically different in, on the one hand, being confronted with an absolute absence and, on the other hand, being confronted with something in relation to which she is actively placed in the position of spectator. The position of spectator is a jointly performed one and this is something that we must keep in mind as we look at the following "eye-ointment scene."

On one of her visits to the Farrell home, Vera Hamid arrived to find that the baby, Maura, had contracted conjunctivitis the previous day. As with almost every event in the household, the matter had already been mentioned by Mrs. Farrell to her mother and at least two of her sisters. After due consultation and discussion over the phone as to the most appropriate course to be taken, Mrs. Farrell decided the infection could be treated at home with some eye ointment she had in the medicine cabinet. This decision should be viewed in the context of Mrs. Farrell's somewhat ambivalent attitude towards "experts" in any field, particularly medical practitioners. On the one hand, she tries to follow almost rigidly every suggestion or prescription made by her Chinese pediatrician regarding the care and feeding of the baby--she was once highly enraged because her husband playfully fed the baby a piece of salami at a time when the doctor had said she should only be given vegetables, fruit and cereal; on the other hand, she is irritated by the fact that so-called "expertise" necessitates her having to pay out $20 a visit for advice she knew anyway. Moreover, the doctor's "foreignness" confuses her as she often finds it hard to understand what he is saying and is embarrassed at the prospect of having an interaction with him where she will be forced to ask him to repeat what he has said at least three times.

In the present case, Mrs. Farrell decided the conjunctivitis was a minor infection and felt more or less certain that the eye ointment she had at home could be used to good effect. However, the "more or less" is important. Mrs. Farrell was not absolutely sure the medicine could be used on the baby and did not want to take any risks particularly since she was foregoing her usual practice of going to the pediatrician every time any slight problem with the baby arose. The literacy event described below was the result of her attempt to verify that her treatment was indeed the correct one. Although Sheila was in the house when it occurred, the interaction that took place was entirely between adults--her parents, the researcher who was originally consulted for her opinion, and a third party over the telephone. What happened was as follows:

> Mrs. Farrell brought out a small bottle of ointment which said "Ophthalmic Ointment" on the label. She then proceeded to read the small print on the label to see if it contained the ingredients that she remembered were usually to be found in such medicines from previous experience with bouts of conjunctivitis that one or other of the children in the family had had. She was not totally convinced. At this point she turned to Vera and asked her opinion. Vera looked at the label and said that

it was probably all right, but that she did not feel comfortable taking chances with medicines for very young children, particularly when it came to eye infections. Mrs. Farrell agreed and now turned to Mr. Farrell, asking him to phone the pharmacy where they usually get all their prescriptions filled to ask the pharmacist to confirm if the medicine she had was the right one. Mr. Farrell asked why she didn't want to phone herself, to which she confessed she felt embarrassed and slightly silly about doing so. Mr. Farrell said he thought she was being ridiculous but complied with the request anyway and put the call through. He explained the problem to the pharmacist and read aloud the information on the medicine label. At almost every point of his explanation and reading, Mrs. Farrell interrupted to correct both his inaccuracies in pronunciation and what she perceived as inaccuracies in the facts he was presenting. He was visibly irritated by the interruptions but nevertheless changed his words to accommodate her criticism. Eventually, when Mrs. Farrell was satisfied that the pharmacist indeed had all the relevant information necessary to tell them what to do, it was established that the ointment was the correct one and the conversation came to an end.

The above is paradigmatic of the kind of scenes on which our earlier summary of the Farrells' relationship to literacy and to each other around literacy was based. Around such an event as the baby's sickness, and confronted with the need to perform a joint action to resolve it, the Farrells must perform a series of secondary actions of a nature in which the practical is so closely meshed with the communicational that it would be impossible to sort out which is which. Communicationally, they must deal 1) with each other (which is quite a large group in such a family); 2) with two experts (the doctor and the pharmacist); 3) with a drug company. It is only in relation to the third that they relate through literacy (when they read the label). They do not do any writing. They do not even consult a baby book. What they mostly do is converse among themselves and the guest. Later, they converse with the pharmacist. They conceive of their difficulties with the pediatrician as being produced by their difficulty in conversing with him. The literacy that happens during the scene is not in itself irrelevant. None of the adults rely on the oral history which they have constructed around the ointment. The literate word is made to provide confirmation. It also has the power of cancelling memory. We are thus confronted again with the sacredness of literacy, its special character outside of everyday conversations, and also by the fact that it is performed as part of a conversation which makes it necessary but encompasses it.

Relationally, the scene is also a good illustration of the established pattern between Mrs. Farrell, her sisters and her husband. This is a pattern which we observed redundantly at the same scale in the rest of the fieldwork and which we can now identify in the detail of one interaction at a smaller scale. With her mother and sisters, Mrs. Farrell has established a pattern of seeming equality. They treat each other as equally competent. This competence, as we see here, is not absolute. They do not treat each other as experts but as persons whose opinion has a value that is not be challenged at the level of overall competence. We refer to this a stance of "uncertain competence." This

is the stance that Mrs. Farrell offers Vera when she asks her opinion and within which Vera's action of referring to a symbolic expert is fully coherent. Mrs. Farrell does not however offer this stance to her husband. Nor does he claim it. He is given the stance of the "probably incompetent" which he does not refuse. He may be irritated by it but he does it. This probable incompetence, however, does not place him outside the scene. He has a place within it and he participates. In other words, while competence is an issue within the family, it is not an issue around which decisions as to who is to participate are made. The competence issue is simply an aspect of the ordering of the relationships.

As for Sheila, she is extremely absent from the scene. We suspect that a full record of the scene would reveal that she is not unaffected and that her absence is deliberately constructed: she is made invisible and Vera, the fieldworker, does not see her. This is not to be considered a failure of the fieldworker, but rather an unwitting success for the Farrells: Sheila is at her appointed place and stays there--invisible. This invisibility justifies all questions one might want to ask about the extent to which Sheila "learned" anything in this scene, besides staying away in like circumstances. It could even be said that she is made to learn that literacy is not (yet) for her. We cannot obviously answer such questions. But these are not the questions which we want to answer. What we want to suggest here is that Sheila's non-reading is just as well structured by her family as her reading is. We also want to suggest that her presence or absence in a literate interaction is not primarily based on her absolute competence but rather by the complex of her constructed competence and her place within the family. As for her absolute competence, the one that is supposedly measured by reading tests, it would seem doubtful that an eye-ointment scene would do much to alter it. We would like the readers, however, to remember that children learn to talk in many different familial and cultural environments that specify radically different places for child talk.

B. FAMILY LITERACY THAT INVOLVES SHEILA

In the preceding chapter, we mentioned in passing some of the literacy activities in which Sheila participates with her parents. We mentioned her preparing shopping lists with her mother, preparing a cake from a recipe printed on a box, reading comic books and simplified versions of famous novels, etc. In the homework scene we look at next, we taped her reading the labeling of a button on the coffee machine after her mother had asked her to turn the machine on. There is no indication in our field notes that Sheila's competence around such tasks is ever at issue. She did succeed in turning the machine on to her mother's satisfaction, her cake got eaten, her shopping help is efficacious. At her appointed place, Sheila is a full participant. This, however, should not cease to puzzle us. Given that Sheila's place is not that of her mother (as the eye-ointment scene illustrated), how can we say what led her to her present absolute competence? We mentioned that it was indeed an issue for her mother who considered it necessary to make a specific effort to develop this competence. Mrs. Farrell was uncertain about Sheila's performance competence and this uncertainty is not to be dismissed lightly. It does reflect something about her experience in relation to Sheila. We do not know to what extent Sheila herself was explicitly conscious of her own uncertainty about herself and her mother's direction. However, we must assume that her own behavior was organized

by her knowledge--however "unconscious"--of the pattern of her mother's response to her.

The following two accounts are thus intended to illustrate some of the familial struggles that involve Sheila and that are performed at least partially through literacy. Through such accounts, we hope to illustrate more specifically our position that family life, however well organized, is indeed an accomplishment in uncertainty--even at the somewhat coarse scale that can be reached through traditional ethnography.

1) The calendar

Hanging on the kitchen wall of the Farrell's home, there is a calendar which, for every month of the year, tells a story in words and pictures out of the life of a black person who has achieved some recognition in his or her chosen vocation. Some of these people are jazz musicians from the 20's and 30's, three are women--none of them, however, are figures like Mohammed Ali or Martin Luther King who Mrs. Farrell thinks everyone knows about. They are less well-known figures, except maybe in specialized circles.

It is a rather curious artifact to find in an Irish working-class home in a mostly white ethnic neighborhood in New York City. As a symbol of what in this household could be construed as threatening, unknown or "outside," the calendar however has formidable potential. We know enough about the family by now to understand that in this house, all printed or visual display of ornaments, pictures, posters, etc. is closely related to the family's continually evolving political and social identity particularly as Mrs. Farrell decides the shape in which it must be molded. The calendar therefore must be understood in the context of an actively updated bulletin board (described next), a poster of Ida Brayman (an 11-year-old girl shot and killed in February 1913 during the struggle of the garment workers of Rochester), two wooden African masks that have come in for much adverse comment from visiting family and neighbors, and other items deliberately and self-consciously exhibited because of the meanings attached to their educative and socializing values primarily by Mrs. Farrell. So we are interested in the calendar, certain it is not there by accident.

Mrs. Farrell tells us she bought the calendar during a meeting of a neighborhood coalition group in which she is active. It was sold to her by the Black director of a local community center as part of a fund-raising campaign to collect money for the center's activities. However, her reason for buying the calendar was not simply to support the center. She saw in it an opportunity to expose her family to aspects of the culture and heritage of those ethnic groups about whom they are especially ignorant. More than that she hoped it would be one way to overcome some of the prejudice and contempt for Black people that she quite realistically sees is an inevitable part of the social education of her children and for that matter, anybody growing up in this neighborhood. She readily states that nearly all the members of her family are die-hard racists, especially her father and her younger sister, and she wants Sheila to be "exposed to Black culture so afterwards she won't be shocked" by its existence. She thinks this would be the case if Sheila were only to be exposed to the influences of her own family. She described that it was for this reason that

she felt very happy when she first bought the calendar and decided to hang it up in the house. For her it represented the taking of a conscious moral position against her family's racist views and opinions. When asked how far the calendar had in fact accomplished any of these purposes, she replied that for the first two months she would read the printed matter from the calendar to Sheila and explain some of the illustrations, and afterwards she noticed Sheila reading it on her own. Her husband at first made derisive remarks about it, and then, as seems to be part of his pattern of interacting with his wife, realizing that her feelings on the matter were not to be shaken either by teasing or semi-macho indulgence at some new form of feminine caprice, backed down and did not make any further comments. Mrs. Farrell said she noticed him sometimes looking at it, but didn't really believe he ever read it. Her sister Christine, other family members and friends had all made various "racist comments" about the calendar which she said made her very angry, but which she found futile to argue against, because she did not see that doing so would change their views in any way. We asked if in any other ways, through the use of print, she had deliberately tried to teach her family anything else about racism. She responded that she had books lying around the house about social class and racial inequalities, but that nobody read them other than herself. She found it frustrating to get either her husband or Sheila to read anything on their own and complained that even when she would urge him to read short, popular newspaper articles on subjects such as "What Makes a Good Marriage?" she would meet with tremendous resistance on his part. Her feeling on the whole is that one cannot, in her experience, teach or help people to change by making them read books.

2) The Bulletin Board

After the first few visits to the Farrell home, one of the things one begins to notice is the bulletin board in the kitchen. It is always full and reflects with a fair amount of consistency the changing concerns, activities and interests of the family from week to week. In this sense the bulletin board is a tool for everyday life which requires that all the family members--including Sheila--use it. It is also a potent educational tool as it offers Mrs. Farrell another form for displaying redundant fundamental aspects of her orientation to life. This is allowed by the fact that not every item on the board is always being changed--some seem to stay on for much longer periods and might even be suspected of staying on permanently. Such items are the E.R.A. button, a green plastic shamrock, a button with 'Miss Piggy for First Lady' written on it, an envelope containing grocery coupons, and Lucy Farrell's unemployment book. They seem to suggest that some of the realities of this family's life are more enduring than others.

Feminism, as we know, is a central concern. Hence, issues of sexual equality are being constantly ground out at the everyday level of behavior and conversation between husband and wife, parents and children, wife and extended family. Should Mr. Farrell take it for granted that his dinner will be cooked as soon as he gets home from work? Lucy does not think so, but needs moral support from her sister Mary not to cut short her visit to Mary's house in order to rush home before 5:00 P.M. Mrs. Farrell describes Sheila's baseball coach as a politically ambitious, unscrupulous person, but nonetheless she is willing to give up time to serve food and drink to visitors on Little League competition

days because the coach is a woman and, therefore, automatically in need of support. Mrs. Farrell says that her husband is very proud of his wife being smart and that when she had first started in the College program, he built her a desk and shelves for her books. However, since he hates being solely responsible for doing anything around the house, he would interrupt her every fifteen minutes at her work. These events serve to remind the observer that Miss Piggy and the E.R.A. button are considerably more than fashionable or platform war-cries.

The shamrock points to a somewhat tired display of ethnic roots. There is not much about the Farrells that immediately says they are Irish. Mrs. Farrell, when questioned about her source of Irish identity, is not really sure--maybe the strength of women in the family, perhaps the meat-potato-vegetable diet, perhaps the sense of humor, the tendency to exaggerate, and sure on St. Paddy's Day, cards are dutifully exchanged, everybody wears green, marches in a parade or wears "Kiss Me, I'm Irish" buttons. The cards are usually the standard store-bought variety, but are sometimes hand-made also and for a couple of weeks after St. Patrick's Day one or two of them might stay on the board. However, since this use of greeting card literacy appears to commemorate every holiday of the year including Mother's and Father's Day, Valentine's Day, Easter, July 4th, Halloween and Christmas, we do not think undue significance can be placed on its functioning as an ethnic marker.

Grocery coupons and the unemployment book are reminders of certain economic realities that seem to be fairly unchanging in the family's life for some time now. Mrs. Farrell tries to cut down on food bills whenever possible and is very assiduous about cutting out discount coupons from food packages and the various baby magazines that keep getting mailed to her ever since Maura was born. The coupons are all collected in an envelope permanently displayed on the bulletin board, and are used whenever Mrs. Farrell goes on one of her major trips to the supermarket which happens at least once a week. The literacy required to "read" the coupons in terms of understanding whether they are mail-order, whether they can be exchanged only in certain supermarkets or in any supermarket which carries the product, is perhaps minimal. However, the sorting and organizing skills and the kind of self-discipline that have all been called forth as a result of the simple possession of this literacy, are considerable. Firstly, in doing her weekly shopping, Mrs. Farrell scans the aisles fairly carefully for products that generally carry discount coupons. Second, she makes sure that coupons have been cut out and saved from the various packages, newspapers and magazines that find their way to the house before they are thrown out again. Third, every week she sorts and categorizes them so that she knows which ones should go together if the products belong to the same category, e.g. beverages or cereals, and thus she does not have to run up and down the aisles pulling out coupons at random; also she groups them according to the stores which are offering the discount or which carry the product. Fourth, she regularly sits down to fill out the mail-order coupons which at least require an address and stamp before being sent. Mrs. Farrell feels the savings that she can make in their monthly budget as a result of these different efforts is worth the tedium of going through them. What is noticeable about these tasks is not simply that they require a certain level of literacy, but that the kinds of cognitive functioning unleashed as a result of the possession of this literacy are far in excess of the literate skills taken by themselves (see Scribner and Cole, 1981, on the Vai).

As for the unemployment book, since the baby was born Mrs. Farrell has never thought very seriously about going back to work and has therefore managed to collect unemployment. It does not add up to much, but is helpful in terms of giving the family a small amount of additional income. Its presence on the board is a reminder that she has enough literacy at her command to know how to fill out the forms necessary to go on unemployment and that she is also adept at hustling a social service bureaucracy that she views with a mixture of cynicism and respect.

Other miscellaneous items displayed on the bulletin board include:

a) Reminders

These include appointment cards for the baby's visit to the pediatrician, invitations, Sheila's prescription for eyeglasses, dry cleaner pick-up slips, certain bills.

b) Items attesting to special achievement on the part of family members

Here there are such items as Sheila's report card or a test paper on which she has done particularly well or Sheila's bowling scores from a tournament in which she scored higher than any of her friends.

c) Items underscoring the various turns taken by intrafamily relationships from time to time

In this category are "sorry" or "I love you" letters, notes and drawings from one family member to another. The frequency with which these are written and displayed seems to indicate that oral acknowlegdement of the maintenance and repair work that go into keeping relationships alive is not enough. In this family the written statement of it is seen as extremely important and much more definitive.

d) Items that commemorate special occasions or events in the life of the family

These can be photographs such as wedding pictures of good family friends or a picture of the two children with Santa Claus at Christmas time, a picture of Sheila with her family at a family outing, or they can be greeting cards for various occasions. A particularly well-received one either because it was hand-drawn by Sheila for her mother or because the words or pictures were found especially appealing can stay on the bulletin board for as long as a month after the occasion itself has passed.

e) Items advertising community events and activities

An enormous number of flyers, posters, pamphlets and leaflets are regularly mailed to the house that tell of different community events, from school board elections to plays to athletic and entertainment events for children. Depending on the relative importance that Mrs. Farrell assigns to any of these, they are regularly posted on the bulletin board and removed after the event has passed.

- tems displaying the family's stance on social and political issues

Aside from the E.R.A. button and items which include newspaper cuttings or cartoons proclaiming the equality of women, Mrs. Farrell regularly puts up on the bulletin board a variety of printed material that leaves no doubt as to her social and political views. They include buttons for the various neighborhood coalition and community groups that she supports, "Dump Koch" or other unpopular politician buttons, newspaper cuttings and articles, cartoons or comic strips that satirize political and social conditions. On one occasion she deliberately put up a cutting supporting a politician she detests--it was a loathing all her family and friends were well aware of and her only reason for doing it was to evoke a response from them whether in the form of a laugh or a discussion.

C. ACHIEVING PLACE

The bulletin board, perhaps more than anything else among the Farrells, is extra-ordinary. In a very concrete way, it reveals them in their uniqueness. No other families in our sample had a bulletin board. The closest thing to it was the refrigerator door on which a few families sometimes displayed various literacy artifacts. But none used their refrigerator door in quite the same all-encompassing way as the Farrells did their board. None had quite so prominent mirrors of their whole life in literate form. In all these ways, and in the fact that the bulletin board has been a longstanding institution among them, it was something that was typical of the Farrells as a unit: they all had to deal with it. It affected them all as participants in scenes in which they were inescapably a part. We could even say that the board displayed the boundaries of the family insofar as only certain items concerning certain persons in the people's network appeared on the board. But it must also be realized that the various members of the family did not themselves relate to the board in the same way, and that what was actually displayed on the board continually changed.

The guardian of the bulletin board is, not surprisingly, Mrs. Farrell. She is cheifly responsible for what goes up or down and how long it stays when it is on. Sheila and, very rarely, her father, will also sometimes put things on that they want the rest of the family to notice, but it is Mrs. Farrell's appointed function to keep the board updated and select whatever items she sees fit for that particular week or month as being paramount in interest and importance for the family's edification. In fact, she is extremely conscious of her role as guardian. She is the "author" of this family's central event in the same manner as she is the author of the calendar's introduction. In an existential sense, she has imposed her will and has been successful. The calendar and the board have become part of the whole family's life. But the need for her to perform such an act also reveals the fragility of her own place. Constant work is necessary to keep it. By now, of course, the family has accepted her act. It is not impossible that, had we been able to gain a better understanding of the family's history, we might have seen how it led her to perform it. All we know about the early years of the Farrells' marriage suggests they were very stormy and that, for quite a while, it seemed possible that the unit would dissolve. Whatever is going on now has not "just happened." It has been painfully constructed.

Similarly, the turn-over of the items on the board further suggests the constant need of the people to act out new performances in a future that is essentially unpredictable besides the absolute knowledge that any action one takes will have consequences that are not fully controllable. Mrs. Farrell's attachment to the board might be seen as an attempt to control. It is certainly an attempt at education. But there is nothing certain about the manner in which the message which she is sending to her partners will get retold in their response. We know that she has not succeeded in alleviating her kin's racism. We cannot be sure of her success in shaping Sheila either as a person who will be seen as a radical, liberated feminist or even as successful in school. What we can be sure of is that Sheila had to deal with the board and that the board participated in placing her in a certain position within the family, and that this position was not that of her mother. Like her father, Sheila was accountable for responding to her mother in kind. The assymetry between them was radical. And yet, of course, they were within the same system that can be characterized as a whole. As we see in more detail through the following analysis of the homework scene, Sheila had an excellent practical knowledge of her position and she held her mother accountable for being the educator. This parallels her father's cooperation in scenes that placed him as the "probably incompetent." It is not that Sheila herself was treated as "incompetent." As it comes out through the following analysis, her fundamental competence is not questioned by her mother even as her competence on single items of school knowledge is probed and criticized. In some ways, it seems that Sheila is treated by her mother like her mother treats her sisters and mother: as the "probably competent." But of course she is treated as a child, and she responds in such terms. She is the "~~uncertainly~~ probably competent-to-be."

Such an account of Sheila's place is intended to emphasize the differentiated nature of Sheila's competence. She is part of her family and her competence is necessarily a result of the position which she has created for herself through the inputs and constraints generated by the family for her to deal with. But such a statement cannot allow us to state unequivocally what this competence is or how it relates to the competence of any of her partners in a mechanically correlational fashion. Sheila, as we mentioned in the preceding chapter, is able to read and write all that her family requires her to read and write. But all these readings and writings are intimately linked to specific moments in her family's life. She does not read or write randomly. She reads and writes particular kinds of texts at particular kinds of times. Her family obviously constrains this performance. With little specific teaching from her parents, she is fully able to perform what she is accountable for. The Farrells, from such a point of view, are a very successful family. Such an analysis, of course, would reveal any family to be highly successful at whatever it does--even if this is disastrous (as in schizophregenic families). The attempt to relate the success of a family to the success of its children in school cannot be dealt with as a matter of course. That Sheila should be able to read a bulletin board to her parents' satisfaction is no guarantee that she will be able to read a blackboard. The fact that she can relate with her mother through literacy (as she does through notes) is no guarantee that she will be able to relate to her teacher through what must necessarily be another kind of literacy. The fact that her mother is comfortable with Sheila's competence is no guarantee that her teacher will be comfortable with it. The relating of a child's place in a home to this

child's place in a school is a much more complex matter than a simple matter of skill transfer. One way to see this is through an analysis of homework scenes during which constraining structures generated by both the school and the family interact.

CHAPTER FIVE

FAMILIAL LITERACY AND HOMEWORK

In the preceding two chapters, we have examined the place of literacy in the Farrells' lives and the place of one Farrell (Sheila) in the literacy performances of her family. In both instances we emphasized the participation of structures hierarchically superior to the one under consideration in the constitution of the specific form which the latter one could be seen to have. Less abstractly, we show how Sheila's participation in her family's literacy is not solely determined by her personal competence, however we would want to measure it. Her actual participation is controlled by the place her parents and kin assigned to her. This does not mean that Sheila could not, and did not, challenge this place. It is rather that this very challenge would not exist as a challenge (rather than as unremarkable participation) if Sheila's place was not socially structured.

Earlier we showed that the Farrells' use of literacy had to be analyzed in a similar manner. We showed how the collective literacy which the Farrells could rely on was probably much greater than the one they were required to use by their social positions with the effect that they had few occasions to practice it and were in some danger of losing it. They did not need their literacy for much. This did not mean that they did not actually use this literacy for more than they absolutely needed. From political action to greeting cards, they did do more than the minimum. But this elaboration, like Sheila's "challenges," is understandable only in terms of what the hierarchically superior levels (the institutions) controlled.

The preceding analyses were conducted at the traditional scale typical of ethnographic accounts. For reasons that may become clearer at the end of this chapter, this scale is particularly appropriate for the identification of social constraints that organize somewhat large groups over extended periods of time and in redundant fashion. This ethnographic analysis, however, has led us to concentrate on matters of communication and interaction. This movement which was suggested by and parallels recent developments in anthropology led us to consider it necessary to conduct on a relevant situation an analysis at a very different scale than the one used for the ethnographic part of the research. This type of "communicational analysis" is designed to account for the detail of the process of interaction in face-to-face situations between few persons. On the basis of the work that has already been done in this fashion (McQuown et al., 1971; Schefflen, 1973; McDermott, 1977(b); McDermott et al., 1978), we assumed that we could see in the detail of interactions between members of our families some echo of the broader patterns that we had identified through the traditional ethnographic analysis.

The present chapter presents the communicational analysis of two segments from homework scenes videotaped in two families of our sample, the Farrells and the Kinneys. We chose to tape homework for many reasons centering mainly around the fact that we knew from the ethnographic investigation that this was a privileged setting among our families where we could observe at the same time several members of the families interacting around an activity

- which involved focused literacy;

- which all people strongly identified with education;

- which the people saw as reflecting their own activity.

We would disagree with our families that homework is in fact the place where their educative activity is best seen. We do not want our focus on homework to suggest that we see in it an overwhelmingly powerful event. Homework is just a good place to conduct a communicational analysis that can help to state our findings about the social constitution of literacy in the processual manner which we consider necessary. Throughout the forthcoming analysis, we preserve the stance that has characterized this work. We are interested in performance, creativity and achievement. But we continue to be interested in the social conditions of these achievements. We believe we can show that there is very little in the performance of homework scenes that the family directly controls. The need to understand what happens outside the homework scene to understand what happens within it is the central theme of our analysis.

This analysis proceeds in five main steps. First, we briefly outline the organization of the particular homework scene that was filmed in each of the families, give some minimal background information about the participants and analytic accounts of sequences within the scene which we later use as illustrations. This initial section incorporates all descriptive background information about the families not provided earlier. It also includes analytic transcripts. Second, we examine what the families do not control in their performance of homework scenes. These are the matters that make them essentially the same kinds of scene across the families. Third, we examine what families appear to control. These are the matters that make them look very different one from the other. Fourth, we discuss the effect of the dialectic between control and lack of control on family dynamics, focusing particularly on the children's success in school. All these analyses rest upon the ensemble of the observations which we have made of these families with an emphasis upon the videotaping of two homework scenes from two families. The communicational analysis of the two scenes allows us to ground our generalization about social patterns more systematically within the daily routine of the families.

A. FAMILIES DOING HOMEWORK

1. Procedures for reporting of observations

a) General considerations:

In traditional ethnographic reporting, it has always been accepted pragmatically, if not always theoretically, that the anthropologists's paraphrase of fieldnotes that were themselves paraphrases of complex events that took place in front of him, was sufficient as the empirical referent of subsequent analyses. It is on such evidence rules that we have relied until now as we discussed familial literacy. As our emphasis changes, so must our rules. To the extent that we believe that the detailed manner that people have of doing something is theoretically more significant than the apparent content of what it is that they are doing, we cannot easily and matter-of-factly substitute our words, arranged in our style, for our informants' words arranged in their style. But we cannot either simply reproduce these words. There are first, and not irrelevantly, matters of media transfer and size: live conversations cannot be made directly available except through various transmutations. We cannot even quite make the video-tape available. Furthermore, the amount of material at our disposal is

such that we cannot display it all except in various scale models. A second, more theoretical problem exists. The anthropoologist's task is not similar to that of a museum curator who preserves and displays artifacts. The anthropological task is an analytical one. It consists in guiding an audience through the artifact to highlight selected properties. In this process, it is not only permissible, but actually required, that the analysis substitute theoretically meaningful words for those of the informants.

There is here, obviously, a difficulty which has been tentatively resolved in various ways since anthropologists have come to focus deliberately on the 'how.' At one extreme we have someone like Geertz who feels confident that it is sufficient to give poetically "thick" accounts of these answers to our deepest problems that "others" give, while guarding other sheep in other valleys (1973: 30). At another extreme, we have the scientistic concerns of those who assume that the transformation of an observation into an analytic description is a purely mechanical problem that will be solved with the discovery of the proper machineries and coding conventions. Neither position is quite acceptable as poles around which to anchor paradigmatic work. But both point out matters that have to be taken care of. The problem with Geertzian thick descriptions is that, however evocative, they are eventually more powerful as accounts of the analyst as "author" in the most romantic of traditions than they are as vehicles for these "other" answers. The problem with the scientistic approach to "transcription" is that it loses sight of the inherent power of the "trans-" event. What was said, in words or movement, is now written in more or less familiar conventions. To imagine that this trans-fer is neutral is to go against all the intuitions about the power of medium and form which have precisely driven research in communicational patterns.

No paradigmatic solution to the difficulty is available. In fact, it may be that the question is not a peripheral one about the mechanics of data reduction to be answered separately from the apparently more theoretical issues that concern the nature of the communicational process. After all, the point of transcribing is precisely to communicate, to enter into special types of conversations with certain audiences. If we accept that an analysis is "made" by a researcher, we must also accept that it is a "fiction"--in the etymological sense of something that is made, if not in the current rhetorical sense of something that is not quite "real" while being particularly real. It is in this spirit that we offer the following accounts of two families doing homework in front of our cameras. These are fictions of fictions. dramatic performances of fictionalized accounts and fictionalized accounts of dramatic performances. They are creations of the world, in the world, for the world and through the world.

b) Specific procedures

The homework scene which we taped for each family is presented through a set of analytic accounts each with a different focus, a different style and a different kind of implicit reader. For each family, we first have an account of the doing of homework according to the canons of traditional ethnographic description. This is followed by a historical account of the taping of the scene on the particular day when it was done. This account stresses the activity of the participants in the vocabulary of such accounts generally available in

our cultural repertoire of forms. These two accounts do not require special reading skills on the part of the reader who can approach them with normal expectations of what a literate text should look like. The following two accounts rely on different reading skills. They do not lend themselves to easy, fluent reading. They contain, however, information that will be used repeatedly in the analysis itself.

The first of the technical accounts describes the organization of the whole tape in terms of its major parts as those can be discovered through attention to massive positioning shifts, the endings and beginnings of activities that require different participants, different movements, instruments, etc. The second of the technical accounts consists of movement to movement and utterance to utterance description of several short sequences within the overall scene. These sequences later serve as illustrations of structural properties of the interaction between the participants around homework. Here again we have chosen to use the "normal" literacy conventions for descriptions of movements and transcription of speech--as far as orthography, vocabulary and grammar are concerned. We have eschewed phonetic transcriptions, mechanical representations of things like pitch, volume or tone, conventionalized displays of kinesics, etc. The only place where our account departs from normal literary conventions for description lies in the amount of details about movement which we incorporate. This may make it difficult for many readers to process the description. These readers may wish simply to begin reading the accounts to get an idea of what we are doing and then come back to them as necessary during the analysis. To help in this process we have numbered utterances according to the following conventions:

F or K refers back either to the F(arrell) scene or to the K(inney) scene;

a-, b-, ... refers back to the various subsequences as they are listed in the following accounts;

1, 2, 3, ... refers to the utterances themselves.

Thus:

Ka-3 refers to the third utterance in the "empty chair" scene sequence during the Kinney homework.

2) Homework among the Farrells

a) Ethnographic and historical account

Every weekday afternoon when she gets home from school, and usually after a snack, Sheila Farrell, 10, settles down to doing homework at the kitchen table in her parents' home. We decided to videotape her during one such session.

When we arrived at 2:15, Sheila had already finished her snack and was getting her books out to begin work. Since it was a Friday afternoon, her major concern was to finish all the work that had been assigned so that she would have the rest of the weekend free to play. She stated this at least three times in

the course of the afternoon. Her mother told us that Sheila is usually "very compulsive" about homework and does not need to be nagged into doing it. The reason, Mrs. Farrell says, is not so much because she loves her work but because she hates coming to class with it not done, thereby risking a reprimand from the teacher and possible embarrassment in front of her classmates.

We started actual videotaping at 2:30. The videotape equipment and the presence of Paul Byers, the cameraman, whom none of the people present had ever met before, did not seem to make anybody nervous or self-conscious. At that time, besides ourselves (Paul Byers and Vera Hamid, the fieldworker), there were six people present in the home--Sheila, her parents, her baby sister Maura, and Mrs. Farrell's younger sister Janet with her boyfriend Carlos. Janet and Carlos left soon after we arrived to go on a shopping trip for clothes. They had slept over the previous night. Mr. Farrell had just come back from a two-day work trip to Boston and seemed very tired. Most of the time that we were there he sat on the pillow-couch joining desultorily into some conversations. Mrs. Farrell and Vera Hamid settled themselves on the couch also and started chatting about their respective children and about the latest development in the relationship between Janet and Carlos. Maura lay asleep on the rug. Sheila, meanwhile, briskly set to work at the kitchen table. She was supposed to complete seven pages out of a reading workbook which she proceeded to do with a minimum amount of help from anybody (only once she called out to her mother for the meaning of a word she could not understand). Most of the exercises had to do with a knowledge of vocabulary and required her looking up meanings from a glossary provided at the back of the workbook. Her physical handling of the task was somewhat laborious. She did not keep a marker on either the page she was working on or at the section where the glossary began. The result was that after each question or completed answer she kept turning pages to hunt for the place in the book that she needed. This meant that it took her a longer time to complete the task than it could have taken. Neither of her parents seemed to notice this. Nor did they come over to the table to check what she was doing while she was doing it. While working, she muttered aloud to herself from time to time.

The living room and kitchen are really all part of the same room so that a conversation going on in either of the two places is audible to everybody regardless of where they are seated. The T.V. was on most of the time that Sheila was doing her work. Despite the noise, however, Sheila did not seem especially distracted. She worked doggedly straight through until the task was completed. In the meantime, Mrs. Farrell and Vera Hamid entered in an informal conversation about personal matters. There were a few semi-serious exchanges between Mr. Farrell and his wife, about why he hadn't called her when he was in Boston. By this time, Janet and Carlos had come back from their shopping expedition and Janet very proudly displayed her purchases which consisted entirely of clothes for herself. She seemed anxious for her sister's approval, which was given readily. When this was over, they left the house once more. The baby was awake by now and was immediately picked up and laid against Mrs. Farrell's breast from which position she seemed content to observe what was doing on around her and not engage in too much activity of her own. Occasionally, she toddled over to her father's side of the couch at which time he would pick her up and cuddle her or say a few words in baby-talk, but she would only stay a few seconds and would then climb back into her mother's arms.

It took Sheila approximately half an hour to finish the homework. As soon as she was done, she brought her books over to her mother to be checked. She positioned herself on the couch between her parents and throughout the period that her mother was looking over her work, she remained physically very close to her, pushing her body up against her mother's side, holding her arm, sometimes even stroking it. She was less continuously physical with her father but seemed completely at ease about touching him, jumping up to sit on his lap, or kissing him occasionally. The T.V. stayed on for a while after Mrs. Farrell began to check the homework. While it was on, she would glance up at it from time to time. It was clear that she could sequentially pay attention to both activities. After a few minutes, however, Mr. Farrell turned it off. Mrs. Farrell went through the exercises very thoroughly, spotting all mistakes and asking Sheila to re-write any words or sentences that she had wrong. She did not tell Sheila the correct answer right away. Rather, she would first ask her to rethink the problem out loud, or she would ask it in the form of a question. Usually the manner of asking would help Sheila recognize her error, though sometimes her mother would have to help her with the entire sentence. Occasionally Mr. Farrell would also look over into the book and prompt or encourage Sheila to get the right answer, but mostly he simply echoed what his wife had already said.

b) Analytic account of the whole scene

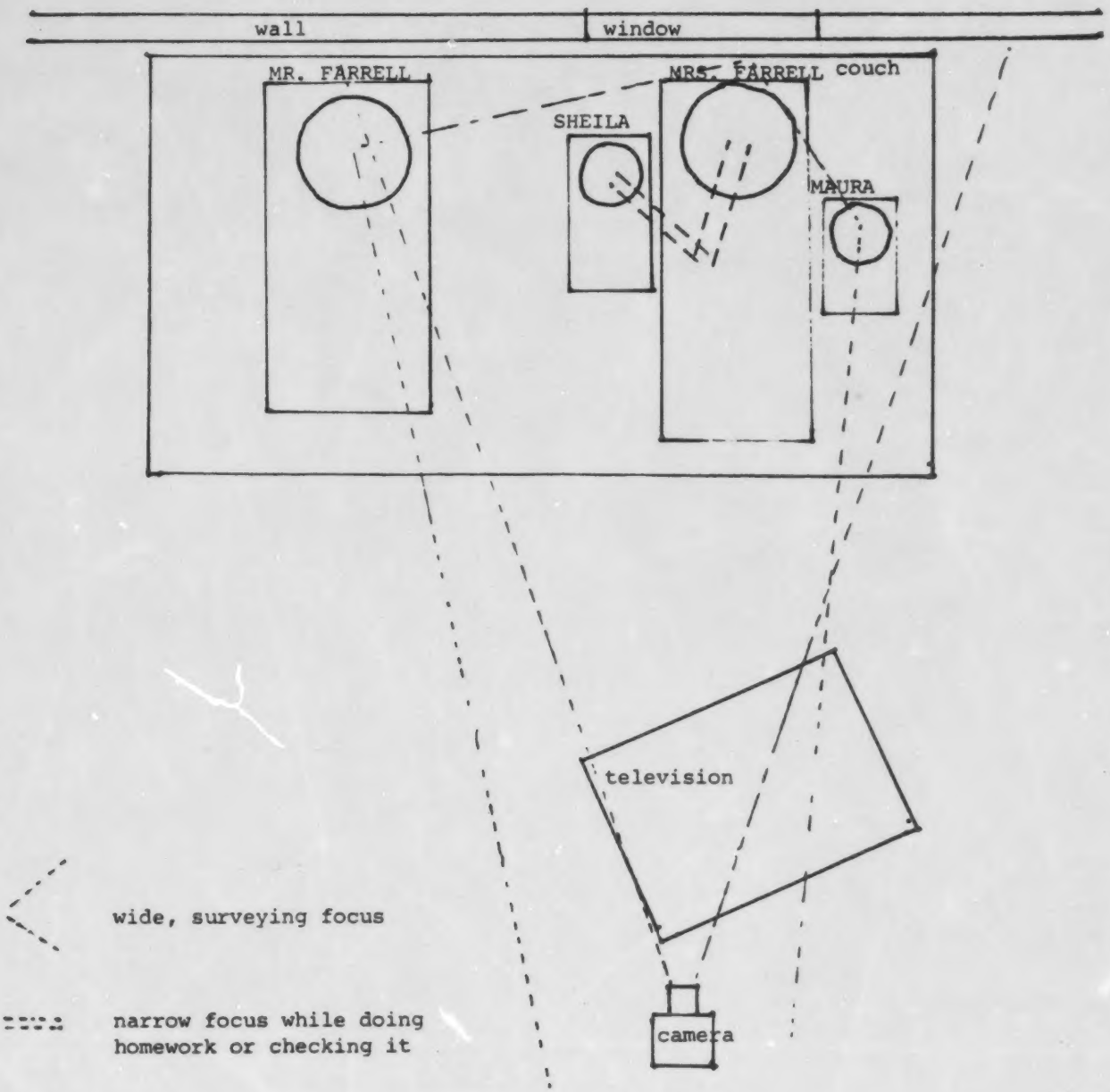
From the beginning, Mrs. Farrell, Sheila and the baby are in the basic positioning which they will maintain throughout the scene. Mrs. Farrell is leaning back on the low couch with her legs extended in front of her. She is holding the workbook which she variously reads (either at arm's length or close to), turns towards Sheila so that this one can read it, or holds to her so that Sheila can write in it. Her attention is on the workbook. The baby is on her left in a position that is almost parallel to that of her mother. Sheila is also sitting in a parallel position to her mother's. This means that she must move her body forward and turn her head and upper torso in order to focus on the workbook which she is constantly called by her mother to do. It also means that the two cannot look into each other's eyes unless they depart from the basic positioning. In a second stage, Mr. Farrell, who has been sitting on the couch away from the other three and at times softly talking to Paul Byers, moves in by turning on his side, leaning on his left forearm propped on the back of the couch and focussing on the workbook with the others (see Figure 2 for a diagrammatic representation of this positioning).

It is obvious that these four people do not stay immobile in this positioning. They are constantly moving at least their heads and, in the case of Sheila and the baby, their whole body as other people ask one of them to deal with something. At the beginning the visitors are leaving and Mrs. Farrell and Sheila deal with that; they deal with the television and they all notice Maura's recognition of a baby on the screen; Mr. Farrell calls for Maura to come to him and she eventually does for a while; Paul Byers rearranges the microphone, etc. However, they continually return to the positioning which we consider basic since it is the one which they hold while performing those tasks that are specifically identified symbolically as being "homework."

FIGURE TWO

FARRELL BASIC HOMEWORK POSITIONING

(initial form)



a - The "Consonant Blend" Sequence (154 seconds)

Historical account. From the beginning, and discounting various brief interruptions, Mrs. Farrell has been reading from Sheila's workbook, signing on the upper right hand corner of each page as she moves on. The reading is cursory and, several times she has to cover something she has already seen in order to question Sheila appropriately. She seems essentially involved in a quick search for possible errors. When she finds one, she questions Sheila, gets her to find the proper answer and moves on. When everything looks right, she does not stop.

As she turns to a new page, and in spite of a statement from Sheila to the effect that she has done it right, Mrs. Farrell focuses and finds a mistake which Sheila does not recognize immediately and seems unwilling to correct. After various calls to order from her father and mother, she goes to get an eraser, her mother erases the wrong answer and Sheila goes through all her answers on the page, correcting when necessary. During this process, Mrs. Farrell attempts to explain to Sheila what a consonant blend is. Right after this, Sheila makes another mistake, and Mrs. Farrell suggests that she is embarrassed to have these mistakes taped. Eventually, she decides that Sheila has most of the answers right, tells this to Sheila who takes it in stride which leads her mother to laugh. This is echoed by the baby who moves about during the sequence from her initial position, to her father and back.

Analytic account. In the minute preceding the sequence, Mrs. Farrell and Sheila have been in the basic positioning by themselves, the baby having gone to her father. Mrs. Farrell has gone rapidly over one page of the homework which she signs. She turns the page and brings the workbook towards her as she focuses on it. Sheila says:

(1) Sheila: That's all right too.

After a silence, Mrs. Farrell orients the workbook so that Sheila can see the page. She points at a spot and says:

(2) Mrs. F: This is a consonant?

Sheila reorients herself to face the page squarely as her mother repeats, while pointing at different points on the page:

(3) Mrs. F: This is a consonant?

(4) Sheila: No.

(5) Mrs. F: This is a consonant?

(6) Sheila: No.

During this exchange, the baby who had begun to whimper leaves her father, passes in front of the camera and goes to settle again at her old position to the left of the mother. Mrs. Farrell and Sheila do not mark that they notice her until Mrs. Farrell briefly glances at her as she says:

(7) Mrs. F: Do you have an eraser?

(8) Sheila: No.

As they say this, Mrs. Farrell has lowered the workbook so that it is lying on her knees and she surveys the room. She and Sheila look at each other as Mrs. Farrell says:

(9) Mrs. F: Get one.

(10) Sheila: I don't have one.

(11) Mrs. F: Well, you better find something.

(12) Sheila: But I don't have one.

(13) Mrs. F: So what you- you are going to leave it like this?

As she does this, she lifts the workbook again and points at something on it. Sheila looks at the workbook and faces her mother so that they are again looking at each other and says:

(14) Yeah.

Mr. Farrell says:

(14) Yeah.

Mr. Farrell says:

(15) Mr. F: No you are not.

After sustaining her mother's gaze for a second, Sheila looks down at the workbook while Mrs. Farrell says:

(16) Mrs. F: You'll leave it wrong.

(17) Sheila: Mmmm.

Sheila begins to unfold her legs as if to get up. As her mother starts speaking, she returns to looking at the book:

(18) Mrs. F: This is not a consonant blend.
This is a vowel.
A consonant blend is two consonants at the beginning of
uh
thing

At the beginning of the explanation, Sheila starts again to unfold her leg. This time she does get up and leaves while her mother looks away and rubs her eyes. Just before she gets up, the baby who, since she came back from her father, has been standing by Mrs. Farrell's left leg, moves towards the camera

and disappears. From back of the camera, Sheila says:

(19) Sheila: Ma, get her away.

Mrs. Farrell finishes her explanation. She is leaning all the way back in the couch; she looks focussedly behind the camera, then moves her whole body to a sitting straight position as she admonishes the baby:

(20) Mrs. F: ++++that make one sound.
Come here, Maura.
Maura.

The baby reappears and Mrs. Farrell points to the place where Sheila used to sit and says:

(21) Mrs. F: Get up here.
Come on.

She grabs the baby by the arm and pulls her to the couch on her right while looking up towards the spot where Sheila will reappear. Sheila comes back and says:

(22) Sheila: Ma, this is the best I could do.

The baby is now standing by her mother's right leg. Sheila climbs on the couch and sits back at her place while pushing the baby's head away:

(23) Sheila: Move, Maura.

Mr. Farrell calls out to the baby:

(24) Mr. F: Come here
Hey
Come here

As Sheila begins sitting, she hands a pencil to her mother who starts erasing. As she finishes erasing, Sheila says:

(25) Sheila: O.K.

(26) Mrs. F: Well, you better find three more consonant blends.

(27) Sheila: F.E. No No

As Sheila says this, Mrs. F looks up and away to her left, leans back from her sitting position to a full laid-back one. She brings her left hand to her mouth, bites the knuckle of her index finger and turns toward her husband, starts a smile and looks away behind the camera with two pointing movements with her chin and the beginning of a shake, while saying:

(28) Mrs. F: Ah, you got it right on tape,
I swear to God.

During that time Sheila has remained focused on the workbook. After a rapid back and forth movement she says:

(29) Sheila: S.C.
A.L.E.

Mrs. Farrell points at the book and Sheila writes in. Mrs. Farrell looks at her and the book as Sheila continues:

(30) Sheila: Mmm
F.E.
M.A.L.E.

As she finishes, she and her mother turn their heads so that they face each other. Mrs. Farrell says as Sheila lowers her head back towards the book:

(31) Mrs. F: What's a consonant blend?

As Sheila answers, she looks at her mother briefly, returns to the book and writes as her mother approves:

(32) Sheila: E.
F.R.

(33) Mrs. F: Right.

While Sheila continues her focus on the book, Mrs. Farrell lifts her head to her right and then straight above the camera to look at her husband and Paul who have been talking since utterance 31 and continue until utterance 34. She returns to the book just as Sheila says, reading from the book:

(34) Sheila: B.L., right.
C.O., no.

She continues reading, while her mother looks on, immobile, from her basic laid-back position:

(35) Sheila: S.T.
Ehhh

Mrs. Farrell moves her hand briefly to point to something on the book as she says:

(36) Mrs. F: You don't have this word down.

(37) Sheila: Stroke.

(38) Mrs. F: Why did you cross it off?

Mrs. Farrell reorients the book and Sheila writes down in it. Then Mrs. Farrell picks up the book again, brings it close to her face and reads. Sheila turns away and surveys the room. Her mother says:

(39) Mrs. F: Well you are very good at this.

Sheila returns and twists so that she can look in the book that her mother begins to reorient as she points to an area on the book. She lays the book down on her lap, looks at Sheila briefly, and signs on the upper right hand corner while Sheila says:

(40) Sheila: That's right.

As Mrs. Farrell signs, she smiles and gives a little laugh while turning away and back again to her right. Sheila says:

(41) Sheila: That's right.

The baby, who had been looking away towards the camera, gives a little laugh as she turns toward Sheila, who echoes the laugh and starts singing:

(42) Sheila: Hmm, [Click] Two little monkeys jumping in the bed.
One fell out and one [click, click, click]

While this is going on, Mrs. Farrell signs the page, turns the book over, brings it up and starts looking at the next page.

b - The Pail Sequence (165 seconds)

Historical account. After finishing the consonant blend page, Mrs. Farrell goes over several pages of the workbook with minimal querying of Sheila. Her husband tries to tease her and gets rebuked. They go over an area which Mrs. Farrell declares she does not know how to do. Sheila affirms her knowledge that it is right. He and Sheila pacify her as she proceeds with the work.

She signs the page, turns to the next. After a joint hesitation about whether Sheila will do this exercise or has in fact already done it, they begin going over it. It is a matter of completing a crossword puzzle by finding words from a list. The first they choose to do involves finding a synonym for "shield." After the question has been set, Mr. Farrell moves in towards the two by turning his body and leaning his head on his forearm which he has propped on the back of the couch. He gently rebukes Sheila when she makes fun. Eventually Sheila settles on the right answer, "screen," but in such a way as to lead her mother to doubt whether she has in fact found it or has heard it suggested in her mother's voice.

Analytic account. At the beginning, Mrs. Farrell and Sheila have returned to the basic positioning: she reads from the book that she holds to her face while leaning fully on the couch. Sheila, who is sitting cross-legged to the right of her mother, watches her mother's reading by leaning and cocking her head. She raises her hand, points at something in the book and says:

(1) Sheila: I ain't doing that.
I am not doing that.
I am not doing that.
I am not doing that.

As she does she begins beating rhythmically with her pencil on the book. She leans back and her mother says:

(2) Mrs. F: Yes you are

(3) Sheila: No I am not, I can't do that

As Sheila comes back towards her mother, this one lifts her hand and points at the workbook, saying:.

(4) Mrs. F: You did it!

Sheila looks at the place in the book and asks:

(5) Sheila: I did it?

Mrs. Farrell focuses back on the book and reads from it while Sheila watches:

(6) Mrs. F: Alright, use the list words to complete the crossword puzzle at the right.
Two

(7) Sheila: Two
Loan

(8) Mrs. F: No
Wait a minute
No

Sheila lifts her hand and points at the book saying:

(9) Sheila: Right there Ma

(10) Mrs. F: Oh! Oh.

Mrs. Farrell unfolds the book and repositions it so that it faces Sheila who keeps her eyes on it as her mother says:

(11) Mrs. F: A shield

(12) Sheila: Apron

As Sheila answers, she looks up at her mother. Her mother stays immobile, looking down at the book. Sheila comes back down at the book and says:

(13) Sheila: Oh it has to be there
Pail

During that time, the baby has been walking about at the feet of her mother. While she corrects Sheila, Mrs. Farrell lifts her eyes from the book, looks at the baby and comes back to the book:

(14) Mrs. F: Pail is a shield?
That's good

Neither _f them moves as Sheila continues searching:

(15) Sheila: Stake
No

During the brief silence that follows, Mr. Farrell turns on his side, lifts his left arm which had been resting on the back of the couch and rearranges it so that it can support his head while his attention focuses on the book with the other two. As he finishes his repositioning, Mrs. Farrell turns her head back and forth briefly and looks at him. He asks while scratching his head:

(16) Mr. F: Shield?

The three of them are now all focussed on the book and stay immobile for a few seconds while Sheila mumbles. (She seems to be reading the words from the list):

(17) Sheila: Pail
++++
++++
++++
Trail
No

With her "trail," Sheila goes rapidly through a whole torso motion to look at her mother, who stays immobile. Sheila goes back to the book as her father says:

(18) Mr. F: No
What would you say?
How many letters?

Sheila moves her head to focus on another part of the book, counts and then returns to the primary point (the list):

(19) Sheila: 1.2.
1.2.3.4.5.

Everybody returns to being silent and immobile while Sheila searches. In the meantime, the baby begins to babble and to climb on top of the television. After a while Sheila speaks, her mother briefly lifts her eyes, looks at her and prods her:

(20) Sheila: No

(21) Mrs. F: Shield
Is a breeze a shield?

(22) Sheila: No

(23) Mrs. F: Is a clam a shield?

(24) Sheila: No

(25) Mrs. F: Is a waist a shield?

(26) Sheila: Yeah

As Sheila gives her last answer, she goes again through the whole torso movement which allows her to look at her mother's face. Mrs. Farrell moves her head so that she can look back at Sheila who says over Mrs. Farrell's own utterance:

(27) Mrs. F: A waist is a shield?

(28) Sheila: No, no

(29) Mrs. F: Your waist is a shield?

(30) Sheila: No, no-o

Mrs. Farrell then turns her head to look at her husband and says:

(31) Mrs. F: You know why?
Because she saw me go down here because she thinks I'm gonna tell her which one it is.

This statement is accented by several brief movements pointing at the book. Mr. Farrell says something that we cannot decipher while Mrs. Farrell continues prodding Sheila:

(32) Mrs. F: Is a grove a shield?

(33) Sheila: No

For a while now, the baby has been half way up the television. As Mrs. Farrell finishes her last prod, she and her husband move decidedly off their basic position. She moves forward to grab the baby, he backs off to his previous povitioning away from the main two:

(34) Mrs. F: Get off it!

(35) Mr. F: Get down!
Come on!

Mrs. Farrell has pulled the baby down. As Sheila proposes another word, she backs down to her basic positioning while her husband comes back to his focus on the book:

(36) Sheila: Hail? No

(37) Mrs. F: Is hail?

(38) Sheila: No

(39) Mrs. F: What does hail mean

(40) Sheila: To the chief.
Hail to the chief

(41) Mrs. F: Right.
Trail?

(42) Sheila: No

(43) Mrs. F: Loaf?

(44) Sheila: No

(45) Mrs. F: Throat a shield?

While Mrs. Farrell asks her questions, she points at various points on the page with the pencil. This makes it obvious that she is not following the list as it is printed but jumps about. On the last question, Sheila looks up briefly at her mother and says hesitatingly:

(46) Sheila: No nooo

(47) Mrs. F: Is load a shield?

(48) Sheila: No

(49) Mrs. F: Is tail a shield?

(50) Sheila: No

(51) Mrs. F: Pail

Sheila looks up at her mother and her mother looks at her as she continues:

(52) Sheila: Yes!

(53) Mrs. F: Is a shield?

(54) Sheila: Yeah

Mrs. Farrell turns her head away to the left and comes back as she asks:

(55) Mrs. F: How is that?

Sheila and she look at each other as the first anwers:

(56) Sheila: It goes over your head
When you play +++++

As she finished her father taps her lightly over the head. Sheila smiles. He says:

(57) Mr. F: That's not right.

They all return to the basic positioning as Mrs. Farrell continues. As before she points with the pencil at each word and stays focused on the book:

(58) Mrs. F: Is queen a shield?

(59) Sheila: No

(60) Mrs. F: Is screen a shield?

(61) Sheila: No

At this point, Mrs. Farrell does not lift the pencil up to move to a new word. She turns her head to the right, looks at Sheila and moves on to another word. As she initiates a new question, Sheila talks excitedly over her:

(62) Sheila: Yes yes, yes, yes

(63) Mrs. F: Is +++

Sheila straightens her body as she speaks, but her eyes stay on the book. As she speaks, Mrs. Farrell looks away briefly to her left, returns to Sheila and then continues towards her right until she faces her husband. She then returns to the book:

(64) Mrs. F: No
Why, because I hesitated
Right
You could tell when I-

(65) Sheila: Is it?

Sheila smiles, lifts her head, looks at her mother who looks back at her. They stare at each other for a moment while half smiling. Mr. Farrell and then Mrs. Farrell whisper "yeah." Sheila straightens back and forth. Mrs. Farrell hands her the book. Sheila begins writing and says:

(66) Sheila: I'm so smart

Mrs. Farrell pulls the book away and says:

(67) Mrs. F: You're so smart, right

As the book gets to its place in front of Mrs. Farrell's eyes, Sheila calls out as she reaches for it:

(68) Sheila: Come on. I didn't write it

Mrs. Farrell first only slightly rearranges the book so that Sheila can have access to it. She then hands it to Sheila to lay it on her own lap as she is told:

(69) Mrs F: You better write there so you can read it

Sheila returns the book to her mother and they continue with another word.

3. Homework among the Kinneys*

a) Ethnographic and Historical Account

Unless an approved extracurricular activity is scheduled, every weekday after school Joe Kinney, age 9, and his sister Kathleen, age 12, go to their maternal grandparents' house around the corner from their apartment. Routinely, after they change their clothes and have a snack, they begin their homework, completing as much of it as possible before their grandmother fixes their supper. Their mother picks them up on her way back from work and they return home, usually between 6:00 and 7:00 p.m.

Usually, the children still have some work to complete. They work separately in the company of their mother; while they do, she fixes her own supper and catches up with them on the day's activities. Often Kathleen, working in her room, manages to finish her studies first. She is then encouraged to refrain from bothering and interrupting her brother. Meanwhile, Mrs. Kinney reviews Joe's assignments, looks at how much he accomplished with his grandmother's help, sees what is left, and assists with its completion. This is done at the kitchen table so that Mrs. Kinney can be near the phone, able to prepare food for herself and the next day's lunchboxes, and able to have some connection with Kathleen's activity.

We arranged to videotape one such homework session at the Kinneys on a Thursday evening in early May, 1981. Paul Byers, the cameraman, and Ann Morison, the fieldworker, arrived at 6:00, as Mrs. Kinney had suggested. It had been agreed that the earlier we could get there after she got home from work, the better since everyone grows progressivley more tired as the night wears on.

In short order, Mrs. Kinney, who was home alone, explained in a chagrined manner that she was just then trying to find Joe. While he was told to be home at 6:00 and knew we would be stopping over, he had left his grandma's house to play and so far a check of the neighborhood had not turned up any news. Ann Morison and Paul Byers suggested sitting and visiting a while and not getting too concerned, while waiting to see what would happen. Ann Morison pointed out the enticement of the longer days and warmer weather. Mrs. Kinney made coffee and Paul Byers set about to ready the equipment. Dan, a friend of Ann Morison's, joined them, and the four adults sat around the kitchen table trading stories and getting acquainted. Mrs. Kinney periodically either made or took a phone

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*See Appendix A for the full profile of the Kinney family.

call as the search continued, apologized, shook her head in disbelief, or showed other increased signs of aggravation and embarrassment. At these times she was reassured all around.

Joe arrived about the time it was getting dark--about 8:00 p.m.--basketball in hand, giving the appearance of having had a good physical workout. His mother left the kitchen to meet him at the door, ask in low tones where he had been, and tell him he knew we were coming, whereupon he announced matter-of-factly that he had had no homework that night.

Mrs. Kinney brought him into the kitchen, hand on shoulder. He was greeted warmly and introduced to Paul Byers and Dan. Joe navigated his way directly to the refrigerator and cupboards for snack food, soda and a glass, and got it arranged, opened and out on the table. Meanwhile Mrs. Kinney remained discomforted, saying this must be the only night of the year they didn't get homework, and suggested that Joe and she check his knapsack together to see what he had. Joe nodded, looked over at the camera equipment, seemed interested in it, and ate, looking a bit unsure about what might be expected of him.

Not finding textbooks as such in the bag, Mrs. Kinney asked Ann Morison what they should do. It was suggested that they might want to do the same kind of checking and reviewing that they usually do when she looks over his work. Mher and son thus arrived where they usually are on other evenings. They came to it a bit differently from other evenings, but in the end the task being videotaped was one of parent and child appraising the status of various assignments, seeing what Joe could or could not do, and asking and hearing about what his teacher did, wanted, saw and/or checked, while family life activity swirls around them.

It was at this point, at approximately 8:20, that Paul Byers turned on the camera. Very soon after the taping began, Dan left the kitchen to see what was on TV in the next room. For a while the people continued to do preparatory activities: Paul Byers arranged the mike, Mrs. Kinney took care of the coffee pot, Joe ate and drank. Eventually, Mrv. Kinney began to pull the loose, assorted papers in Joe's bag, getting his pens and pencils in order. She inquired about a blank ditto sheet to be filled out for a science project. Joe explained about the tomato plant he put in soil that died from overwatering. This matter was tabled. There was a brief discussion of the word igneous also taken from a worksheet. Joe told his mother it is "ingeous"--a kind of rock. She repeated his mispronunciation doubtfully, looked at Ann Morison questioningly and received no clear sign. The matter was left unresolved.

Much of the remainder of the scene was spent undertaking two and three place division problems for practice. Mrs. Kinney wrote them on notebook paper, insured the use of scrap paper for figuring and checking by multiplication, and sat by while Joe worked the problems. His worksheets indicate that he figures out on paper an approximation by multiplying to the nearest 10, sometimes using his fingers to help count.

Toward the end of the half hour, when the problems were done, Mrs. Kinney turned to the crossword puzzle in his Weekly Reader. They worked on it together. Mrs. Kinney's main suggestion was that he use pencil to erase

if need be. Joe could answer the clues and write in answers without major dfficulty, and this exercise turned out to be more of a question and answer game--with hints sometimes given to supplement clues. Joe smiled more during this segment and unstiffened somewhat, as did his mother.

Finally, in the very last minutes, Kathleen came in, joined the group, goofed around and caused much laughter all around with her imitations. She seemed not to know or care too much about what was going on, but just spontaneously inserted herself into the flow of events. As the "spotlight" shifted from Joe to her, Joe, her mother and Ann Morison all accepted both her presence and the comic relief she provided.

b) Analytic account of the whole scene

The scene can be divided into two main parts redundantly marked by 1) the activities for which the two main participants are held accountable and 2) their joint positioning. In the first part, Mrs. Kinney searches for work to assign Joe and prepares assignments. In the second part, Joe performs the work (long division) which his mother has assigned. Throughout the scene Ann Morison sits back in her chair as far as she can. The general activity structure of the scene is as follows (see figure 3 for a diagrammatic representation of the two positionings):

1st stage: mother is active/child waits/fieldworker observes

2nd stage: mother waits/child is active/fieldworker observes

In figure 2, the dotted lines represent the type of focus characteristic of the positioning. It is either wide (waiting, observing) or narrow (searching, writing, etc.). Neither positioning allows for eye contact without major body shifts. These are not conversational positionings. It should be noted that, while the exact place where mother and child sit at the table is partially an artifact of the need of the camera, this is the table at which Mrs. Kinney checks on Joe's homework every other evening.

The structure of the activities and positioning is stable for the duration of the stage. This does not mean that the participants are not in constant movement. At times, this appears to break the positioning. In fact, as we show at greater length when discussing specific sequences, the exact form of these departures is to be understood in terms of the higher level definition of the stage within the scene. The first stage thus can be analyzed into two main substages and several patterns of intrusions which constitute as many challenges to the order:

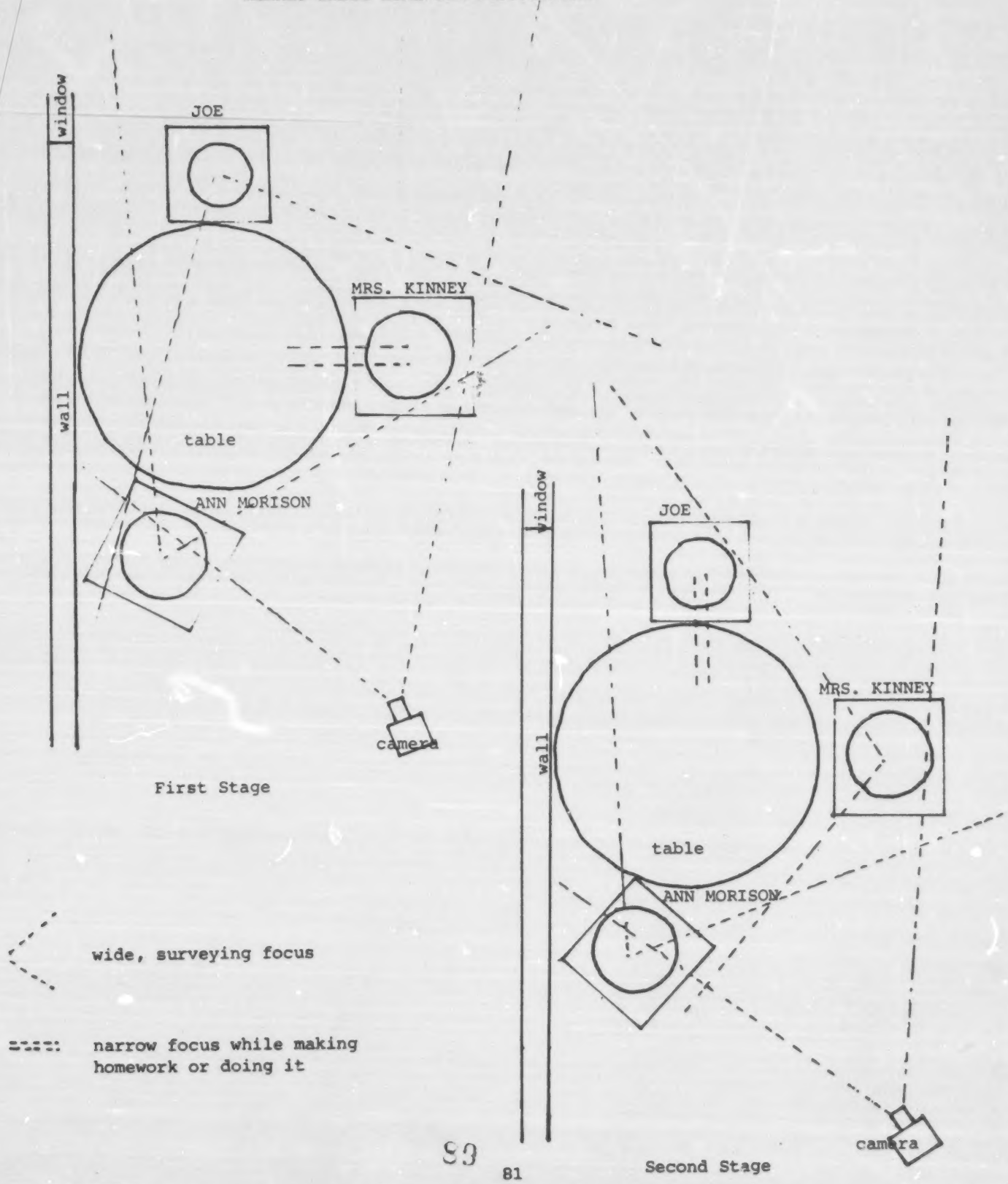
- Stage 1, substage 1) "Introduction": The child has adopted his place within the positioning while his mother and the observers are still in pre-homework activities (and positionings);

- Stage 1, substage b) "Search for assignment": Mrs. Kinney adopts her place. She looks into Joe's bag, discusses with him various academic activities, and then writes divisions for him to do;

The challenges are made up of such activities as:

FIGURE THREE

KINNEY BASIC HOMEWORK POSITIONING



- getting, offering and consuming food and drink;

- settling the physical setting

- answering the telephone.

Each shift from substage to substage, each process of dealing with an intrusion requires motions in and out of the basic positioning. Most of these intrusions consist of a call to perform some activities which are directly under Mrs. Kinney's formal authority. The most typical of these is the telephone which rings several times during the scene. In each case, Mrs. Kinney gets up to answer it and Joe stays put. While she is away, Joe who, in any event, is not structurally expected to do more than wait with no specific focus, is left hanging. In fact, and not surprisingly, he takes such opportunities as occasions for initiating his own intrusive activities. This means that most movements in and out of the positioning during this stage are jointly performed.

The second stage is somewhat more stable. It can be analyzed into an initial stage when Mrs. Kinney is pronouncedly involved in checking Joe as he does the first division. During this substage she is sitting at the edge of her seat and focused on the same point as Joe. In the second substage she disengages herself, sits back in her chair, lights a cigarette and converses softly with Ann Morison. It is only at wide intervals that she checks what Joe is doing. Here again, the same kind of intrusions have to be dealt with. These also are calls for the involvement of Mrs. Kinney. To the extent that she is not directly involved in the doing of homework any more, her activity with the telephone or the food are less disturbing of the scene. This makes the second stage much less complex, interactionally, than the first.

c) Illustrative accounts of sequences

a - The Empty Chair Sequence (35 seconds)

Historical account. The camera has just been turned on. Joe is sitting at the table while Mrs. Kinney moves about the kitchen putting out food for the guests and Joe. Ann Morison's friend asks Mrs. Kinney about her ethnic background. This leads to a discussion of the geographical location of Irish counties. Joe gets up and sits down again twice. He pours himself some Coke. Soon after Mrs. Kinney also sits and picks up Joe's book bag from the floor. She looks into it. Joe gets up and leaves the room. This is noticed by Mrs. Kinney, Ann Morison and her friend and leads to a laughing exchange about Mrs. Kinney's prediction that Joe would leave when they started homework. As they finish laughing, Joe comes back with a chair for Paul Byers who has been sitting on the floor. Mrs. Kinney apologizes implicitly to Ann and explicitly to Joe.

Analytic account. Joe is the first to adopt the basic positioning for this stage of the homework scene. While Mrs. Kinney moves about the kitchen, he mostly sits at the table, staring straight ahead and waiting. During the conversation about Ireland he does get up, leave and come back twice. This is not explicitly marked. Eventually, Mrs. Kinney sits down and, as she does, all participants are in the basic positioning: Joe stares ahead, she looks in the bag, Ann looks at both from as far "out" as her chair allows. While looking in, Mrs. Kinney says:

(1) Mrs. Kinney: Let's see what you have, Joe.

As she says this, Joe gets up and leaves. Mrs. Kinney looks at and leans pronouncedly into the empty chair as she says:

(2) Mrs. Kinney: A pipe

While she still looks at the empty space, Ann Morison, her friend and Mrs. Kinney start laughing in unison and she says:

(3) Mrs. Kinney: What did I tell you?
Joe, where have you gone?

They all continue laughing. Mrs. Kinney turns toward Ann and says:

(4) Mrs. Kinney: All I got to do is to bend my head and he's gone.

While they are all still laughing, she returns to the book bag and says (in the tone of the long suffering mother who understands her fate):

(5) Mrs. Kinney: Oh Joe

The tone would indicate that this is addressed to Ann. She then states in an almost severe call to order:

(6) Mrs. Kinney: Hey Joe!

The tone would indicate that this is addressed to Joe. As she finishes, she pulls out a notebook from the bag. While she does, Joe comes back from the next room carrying a chair, and Paul Byers says:

(7) Paul Byers: That's what I thought he was doing.

Mrs. Kinney lifts her head and looks first to her right and then to her left as Joe passes behind her with the chair. Paul Byers settles in and Joe asks:

(8) Joe: Where did you put everybody's coats?

Paul thanks Joe (9) and explains:

(10) Paul Byers: He doesn't like me sitting on the floor.

While this is happening, Mrs. Kinney turns to Ann Morison, looks at her as she opens and closes her arms, checks back to see Paul Byers sitting and says:

(11) Mrs. Kinney: Paul went down on the floor and I didn't even notice.
Thank you Joe.

As she says this, Joe comes back to his chair, sits down and adopts anew the basic positioning. He and his mother are now together and she says:

(12) Mrs. Kinney: You are a good host.
I'm a rotten hostess

She lifts her head toward Joe and lowers it again on both "host" and "hostess." The first time, Joe seems to smile. They are again in the basic positining and stay put for 20 seconds.

b - The Coupons Sequence (122 seconds)

Historical account. About ten minutes have elapsed since the end of the empty chair sequence. During that time Mrs. Kinney has been going through Joe's book bag and questioning him about various academic matters that could be used for her to make up an assignment. She begins to mention math problems. This is interspersed with miscellaneous other activities. The beginning of the sequence is marked by Joe picking up a book of coupons from the table and reading them aloud. As he does, Mrs. Kinney questions him about the products. Then they have a brief discussion about whether a supermarket still doubles coupon discounts. This leads Joe to wonder about the double of 12 which, after some self correction, prodding and correction from Mrs. Kinney, he finds. While this goes on, Mrs. Kinney tears a page from Joe's notebook and starts to write copy onto the page from the notebook.

Analytic account. Just before the beginning of the sequence, Joe had slightly departed from the basic positioning for the first stage of the scene as he leaned towards his mother (who was then leaning into the notebook) to help her find a page. Then Joe straightens out. He turns to his right, picks up the book of coupons from the table and, as he comes back, says while looking at it:

(1) Joe: There's a coupon, ma. Save 20¢.

Mrs. Kinney looks up from the notebook, leans in towards Joe, focuses on the coupon, leans back and refocuses on the notebook as she asks:

(2) Mrs. Kinney: On what?

Joe remains focused on the coupon as he answers. He reads hesitatingly and then elaborates by describing the product:

(3) Joe: Umm
Cremio
It's uh
um
coffee
coffee

As he does this, Mrs. Kinney first goes through a look in towards coupon/look out motion. Then, in parallel to his hesitation, Joe goes through the lean in/lean out motion toward his mother as she tears a page from the notebook. She asks:

(4) Mrs. Kinney: What kind?

She picks up a pencil. Joe remains focused on the coupons. These are strung together and he manipulates them. During Joe's next utterance, Mrs. Kinney is

first in her basic position then does an abbreviated look in/look out motion which transforms into a lean in/lean out one as she asks her question:

(5) Joe: Cremora
Cremoa
And uh
save 35¢ on Real Lemon
Save 10

(6) Mrs. Kinney: On what, Joe?

(7) Joe: Real Lemon.

As Joe gives his answer and then proceeds to read the coupons both of them return to their basic positioning: he reads, she writes. They stay like this for a few seconds through the beginning of Mrs. Kinney's questioning.

(8) Joe: Save 10¢ on Borden Frosted.
Save 35¢ on Kavia.
Save

(9) Mrs. Kinney: On what?

(10) Joe: Kavia.

(11) Mrs. Kinney: What's that?

(12) Joe: Instant coffee it says.

As Joe gives his last answer, Mrs. Kinney, who has continued to write until then does a very pronounced, lean in/lean out motion which she punctuates, as she comes back, with:

(13) Mrs. Kinney: Kava. Kava.

While she does the above, Joe does not shift. He continues reading:

(14) Joe: Save 12¢ on American Cheese.

Then Joe folds the coupons, replaces them on the table to his right, turns, focuses on the notebook where his mother has been focusing, and starts leaning towards his mother in a reverse motion to those his mother performed until then. As he begins Mrs. Kinney lifts her head towards him and says:

(15) Mrs. Kinney: And Key Food has double coupons, right?

Joe is now looking at the notebook while Mrs. Kinney looks at him. He makes a noncommittal questioning sound which she takes as a signal of a need to recycle:

(16) Joe: Hm?

(17) Mrs. Kinney: Key Food has double coupons. So you get double that, right?

As she says this she emphatically points her finger towards the coupons. This happens at the time when Joe has finally reached the full "into his mother" positioning. As she returns to the notebook he moves out and looks at the coupons:

(18) Joe: Yeah I think so. I'm not, I think they stopped the double.

At this point they have returned to the basic positioning. Joe takes a drink while Mrs. Kinney writes, leaning her head down on the paper:

(19) Mrs. Kinney: No

At the next moment both Joe and Mrs. Kinney start together:

(20) Mrs. Kinney: How about Joe: They didn't

Mrs. Kinney continues to write. Joe leans towards the coupons and picks them up as Mrs. Kinney says:

(21) Mrs. Kinney: No they still have it. How about some long divisions?

She is still writing. Joe looks at her and starts in an excited voice:

(22) Joe: What would be what would be
all right
What would be the double of 12¢?

Mrs. Kinney stops writing and looks up at him. They are now both looking at each other and sustain this basic positioning during the following exchange except for brief moments when Joe averts his eyes by looking down:

(23) Joe: Uh, see I think
Yeah six
six double

(24) Mrs. Kinney: Six would not be the double but
half

(25) Joe: half

(26) Mrs. Kinney: half
so what's

(27) Joe: half of 12 is 6

(28) Mrs. Kinney: but how do you double 12?
how much do you get if you double?
I give you 12¢

(29) Joe: 21

(30) Mrs. Kinney: No
I give you 12¢ and a couple of minutes later I give you another 12¢

(31) Joe: 24

During this dialogue Joe handles the folded coupons and they fall on his lap. He looks up when giving his answers. After the last one he returns to staring straight ahead and thus away from his mother. At the same time Mrs. Kinney returns to the notebook as she says:

(32) Mrs. Kinney: Right Right
So how much would you get back on that coupon?

They are now back where they started. Mrs. Kinney is focused on the coupons, and she does not pick up on Joe's failure to answer her apparent question.

c - The Division Sequence (230 seconds)

Historical account. (About 3 minutes have passed) Joe has been given a long division to do and Mrs. Kinney watches him do it. Her checking becomes more intense, she does the division herself, checks what Joe is writing, looks back at her notes, repeats the process and starts challenging Joe. Joe defends himself strongly and Mrs. Kinney retreats as she realizes that Joe is on the right track and that she has just misread one of his numbers. They agree he is right and he proceeds with few comments from his mother.

Analytic account. At the beginning, Mrs. Kinney and Joe move into the basic positioning for the second stage of the homework. She calls for him to become active:

(1) Mrs. Kinney: All right, let's do the math first.

He asks:

(2) Joe: xxx scrap paper

She looks about herself and says:

(3) Mrs. Kinney: You want scrap paper?

She picks up a sheet of paper on her left, puts it by Joe on her right, points at another piece on which Joe's hand has been resting all that time, and says:

(4) Mrs. Kinney: You can use that.

Joe's right hand descends on the paper and he begins writing. Mrs. Kinney lifts herself, extends her hand away from Joe, picks up a potato chip, seems to hesitate between watching Joe and turning away from him. She does the latter as she relaxes back in her chair. She and Ann Morison talk desultorily:

(5) Mrs. Kinney: Have some more, Ann.

(6) Ann: These are great potato chips.
You really can't hardly stop.

(7) Mrs. Kinney: I know.
It's terrible.
You're right.

They laugh. In several stages that take 28 seconds, Mrs. Kinney moves from watching Joe in a general unfocused manner, cocking her head more and more pronouncedly to see what he is writing, and finally leaning toward him with her eyes on the paper as she says:

(8) Mrs. Kinney: Um, I'm sorry.

Joe stops writing while still looking at the papers:

(9) Joe: Why.

(10) Mrs. Kinney: I think I made a mistake there.

She looks to the papers on her left, picks up some and leans toward the table in a very focused manner. Joe says:

(11) Joe: Do I have to check it?

(12) Mrs. Kinney: No, you're right. It's right.

She straightens out and returns to watching him attentively as he refocuses on his paper:

(13) Joe: Do I have to check it?

(14) Mrs. Kinney: Do you know how?

He erases while saying:

(15) Joe: No
Uh
Yeah

She leans in towards him and immediately leans back out, lifts some paper and writes on a piece beneath. She replaces the papers, leans in and out towards Joe, checks back at her paper by lifting the corners of those above and returns to Joe. She sits forward to the edge of the chair and says:

(16) Mrs. Kinney: Um
Joe
Could you explain to me
something

Joe stops writing:

(17) Joe: What?

(18) Mrs. Kinney: Because you do this different

After being still a moment, Joe starts writing again saying:

(19) Joe: I, I'll check it.

(20) Mrs. Kinney: Oh I know.

(21) Joe: It's going to come out right.

(22) Mrs. Kinney: You do it different
than me and I just want to know

As she says this, she looks down at her paper beneath and returns toward Joe who is still writing. He says:

(23) Joe: It's my own way of how I do it.

Joe writes for a while while his mother looks at him. Ann Morison asks:

(24) Ann: How do you do it, Joe?

Joe counts on his fingers. Mrs. Kinney, after a silence, says:

(25) Mrs. Kinney: Yeah.
I see where your
boo boo is.

Joe says loudly while still looking at the paper:

(26) Joe: No there's <u>nothing</u> wrong.

(27) Mrs. Kinney: Sure.

(28) Joe: Wait.

(29) Mrs. Kinney: This is how.

(30) Joe [who begins erasing]: I'll do it over.

(31) Mrs. Kinney: Let me show you something first.

(32) Joe: There's got to be a remainder.

(33) Mrs. Kinney: Right
There has to be a remainder.

During this exchange, Mrs. Kinney punctuates her utterances by extending her

right forearm down on the table while she lifts and brings it to her eyes as Joe speaks. With Joe's last utterance, he stops writing, lifts his pencil. She looks again at her papers and then says after Joe has declared:

(34) Joe: Let me do it again.

(35) Mrs. Kinney: There's no remainder on this one.

He writes while she leans towards him.

(36) Mrs. Kinney: But show me
how you divide 21 into 1,554

He talks aloud while writing:

(37) Joe: Like this
21 times 7
4 into 7 is
14
147
Cause if I go 8
it would be too high

Mrs. Kinney has gone "oh" on top of his "if I go 8." He points to his answer with the pencil. She picks the pencil, erases and writes on Joe's paper.

(38) Mrs. Kinney: That's right
O.K.
Make the 4 look like a 4
I thought that was a 9
All right. You're right.
147 mmmm

B. WHAT THE FARRELLS AND THE KINNEYS DO NOT CONTROL

Even at the broadest of the scale which we used to present the Farrells and the Kinneys in the preceding section, the difference between the two families is striking. We show in the next section that this difference is profound and even more striking at the smaller scale provided by the communicational analysis of short segments of the scenes. These families differ in the kinds of people who participate in the scene, in the way the scene is sequenced within everyday life and in the way the scene is itself internally sequenced. They also differ, as we show later, in the type of interpretations of the scenes and of the participants that they allow.

Some of the differences, obviously, are the result of the specific conditions under which the families found themselves the particular evening we taped them. It is certain that Mrs. Kinney and Joe were at a great disadvantage because, of all nights, Joe's school had not given him any homework to do: Mrs. Kinney was embarrassed; Joe was tired. It is not irrelevant that they did not request that the taping be called off and that they do not show this embarrassment and

tiredness as they doggedly pursue their joint assignment. It is certain also that both families were in some unspecifiable way "different" from what they may have been on the other nights, when their home was not invaded by a camera and its attendants.

For all these reasons, it would not be possible for us to claim that the scenes we taped are in any strict way "typical" of homework scenes among the Farrells and Kinneys, and even less of such scenes across working class families. But our interest is other than typicality. If we must assume that both families were "on stage," and that they were "acting out," we can also assume that this drama which they were putting on for us could not possibly have been improvised from scratch. The families were improvising. But they had a script. They also had what any human performer always has, and that is a "style." For the fieldworkers who knew the families very well, it was obvious in fact that both families were not reacting to the camera in any way that was stylistically different from the usual style they adopted in front of them. This does not mean that the quality of the fieldworkers as audience did not always transform the exact performance of the actors. It is rather that no audience can fully transform a performance, particularly when so much of what the actors have to do is in fact prescribed by the script around which they must improvise. These prescriptions in form and content are precisely what interest us. To the extent that we can identify them in the scenes which we do analyze, we are entitled to assume that all these prescriptions, except of course those that have to do with reacting to being taped, have to be dealt with in the creation of any such scenes, however unique the actual conditions.

These theoretical generalizations are in fact empirically confirmed when we observe how much the profoundly atypical scenes which the Farrells and Kinneys put up for us have in common. Both of them have to deal with many of the same matters. These are the ones we now want to outline.

1. Homework as special event within the day

It is not trivial that both families had a name for what it is that they were doing when we taped them and that this label is the same as the one we are using here. We told the families we wanted to tape them "doing homework." They told us "this is homework," and--as natives--we can recognize what they did as indeed "homework." This commonality raises two complementary issues. First, the label reveals that a certain sequence of human activity is separated from other such activities. Homework is special. Furthermore, a set of features help distinguish this activity from other activities. These features organize some of the actual performances of the participants. They then organize the representation of these performances in settings where the homework is not being performed at the moment (as in discussions on such matters as whether the homework has been done, or in research on homework). Second, the commonality of the label among both observed and observer implies that the distinctive features are not controlled by either and thus represent common constraints. We can all agree when looking at a scene whether it is homework or not. We can jointly discuss homework without having to establish any elaborate groundwork about the relevance of the discussion.

To most researchers on homework, this has meant a generally unformulated decision to rely on this shared knowledge and not to examine its constitution. They assumed, in effect, that, since we all could recognize homework, there was little to be learned by examining the exact constitution of this knowledge. We take the opposite stance. For us, it is precisely because homework is so much a part of our lives that we probably do not know exactly what shape it has and how this shape limits and organizes what we can do with it.

Let us think a while longer about the specialness of homework as an activity within the day. We talked about it earlier in what we refer to here as purely "textual" terms, i.e., in terms of the words and other linguistic forms which are used to mention homework. But, to the extent that homework is a very practical activity, it must also have kinesic aspects that are constituent part of the activity, but which are not usually brought to textual explicitness. If we look at the various positionings which the Farrells and Kinneys adopted (see figures 2 and 3), however different they may initially appear if we focus on the alternance between relaxation on a couch vs. tenseness around a table, we can see that all the positioning had in common was the focussing of attention on a piece of paper that acted as the center around which the participants arranged themselves. In all the subpositionings as well, we can see that the physical need to center on the paper is the one that is primarily dealt with so that the participants cannot easily face each other except through departures from the basic positionings. It is certain that the participants jointly create this positioning. It is also certain that, once they have created it, they find themselves in a very "strange" interactional posture--if we take as "normal" the directly face-to-face orientation that one can adopt in freewheeling conversations.

Had we conducted similar kinds of communicational analyses on other scenes within the families' lives, it is probable that we would have observed a whole range of focused positionings, only some of which would have taken the simple form of face-to-face interaction. It is probable that the kind of centering of attention to an artifact on which a group is to work could then be seen as something that also happens in other scenes than homework. It is a whole set of distinctive features which distinguish homework as a special event. Positioning is only one of them. It is also true that we know that homework is starting even without an explicit statement from participants such as "Let us now start homework." It is enough that, as Mrs. Kinney does at the beginning of the empty chair sequence, she sits down, focuses on the contents of a bag and says, "Let's see what you have Joe" (Ka-1). For a while now, it has been known that homework was about to start. But as long as Mrs. Kinney walked about the kitchen, dealt with the visitors, food and talked about her Irish background, homework was not being performed. It could not be performed. The people were not in position. The play had not yet started.

What then are the most striking textual and dramatic features of homework scenes?

2. Primary spotlight on single child

It must first be noted that a strict relationship of ownership is established between the scene and only one of the participants: the scenes are "Sheila's homework," and "Joe's homework." Furthermore, it is said that it is Sheila, or Joe (as subjects), who DO "their" homework. The rest of the family may, or may not, HELP. The speech acts are different. Besides the purely verbal aspect of this definition there are also definite behavioral matters that both make homework scenes stand out and represent them symbolically. Typically, among the Farrells, the drama of homework is a two-stage event with a very clearly defined time for the child "whose" homework it is to act by herself, within the context of her family, but separated by the fact that she only is involved in the subsequence within the scene (answering questions in a work book). Sheila, at first, is not involved in dialogue with anybody. She is alone, symbolically, in that the whole family is collaborating in singling her out and letting her stand under a kind of spotlight. This joint collaboration is particularly striking among the Kinneys where the participants stay in close contact. As the analysis of their subpositionings revealed, the whole scene is strongly organized into two subscenes. In the first the mother works while the child waits. In the second the child works while the mother waits. Their cooperation lies in the setting of this sequence of positionings. It does not lie in the doing of long division. Furthermore, the two tasks are not parallel. Mrs. Kinney sets something up for Joe to do. She herself is not doing homework--at the level of the definition of the actors and their plays. At the next higher level, "Mrs. Kinney-setting-something-for-Joe-to-do" is certainly a complex action, something which she does. In the second positioning, she is not simply "waiting." Her waiting is an activity. The total joint action is internally differentiated.

This spotlighting of the single child is obvious at such times when we can see the child alone with her book and pencil. The situation is more subtle, and perhaps more revealing, at such times when parent and child are immediately involved together in doing the child's homework. This happens in the second part of the Farrell scene when the mother reviews Sheila's work. At that time, Mrs. Farrell undoubtedly is working. In fact, by the end of the scene, she has done on her own all the homework that Sheila had to do. She is doing it "by herself," insofar as there is no discussion between her and her daughter about her own attempts to reach the right answer. She is also constantly engaging Sheila around the "mistakes" this one made. At such times the differentiation of the actors' roles is expressed only implicitly in the assumptions that are continually being made about, for example, the issue of authorship of single answers to homework questions. In four different occasions, Mrs. Farrell wonders in various ways about the process which Sheila has followed to arrive at the right answer: did she do it "on her own" (and on the basis of her understanding of what it involved), or did she do it because her mother has, unwittingly, but in a way that she cannot prevent herself from doing, told Sheila by the tone of her voice or her hesitations what was the "right" answer. Look, for example, at the exchanges at the end of the pail sequence (Fb-58 to 66). Mrs. Farrell jumped about as she went through the list of words within which is hidden the synonym for "shield." She goes through a long list of words. We can assume that she has already seen the proper one and that she is deliberately trying not to feed Sheila the answer (this has already been

an issue two times earlier). But, after Sheila answers "No" to her "Is screen a shield?" (Fb-60 and 61), she does leave her pencil pointing at screen longer than she has on other words and she looks up at Sheila. This is enough for this one, and Sheila corrects herself as her mother starts asking her about another word. What is interesting, in this context, however, is not the obvious interactional competence of both Sheila and her mother. Both are extremely aware of each other, in tune with each other's patterns. Mrs. Farrell also reveals a kind of meta-knowledge about human interaction that is sophisticated indeed. But rather than celebrating these competencies, she makes an issue of it. She looks at her husband and she rebukes Sheila: "No, why, because I hesitated, right, you could tell when" (Fb-64). She is not very upset since the exchange continues with a half smile and Sheila's "I'm so smart!" It remains that the complex dramatic and textual commentary that Mrs. Farrell feels she must make can only be understood in terms of a departure from some kind of norm. And this norm has to do with authorship of an answer: it is Sheila's homework; she must answer and she must answer out of her own body of knowledge, not through a search for someone to give her the answer, however competent this search may be.

When we look at the whole scene, it is obvious that Mrs. Farrell in fact does repeatedly feed the right answer to Sheila. If Mrs. Farrell feels competent in a subject matter, she won't let Sheila take wrong answers back to school. This is nowhere so clear than at the beginning of the consonant blend sequence (Fa-1 to 13). Sheila may claim that she is going to leave it the way she wrote it, but this could not possibly happen once her mother had noticed the error. Indeed, from the point of view of a teacher who would want to rely on homework to evaluate a student's competence, such a process could be considered to skew the results completely. Indeed, we suspect that a few teachers would so use homework. Homework, at its best, is an educational experience for the children, but it cannot be relied upon as a ritual situation for the testing of individual competence.

And yet, the parents themselves also participate in placing the spotlight on their children. It is easy to argue that "Sheila's" homework certainly is "Sheila and her mother's" homework since there is no way for us to measure separately their individual competence. But it is also true that Mrs. Farrell is organizing the dialogue to place the spotlight on Sheila. Mrs. Farrell continually adopts a verbal style reminiscent of the teacher role: she asks eliciting questions ("This is a consonant?"), asks elaborating questions to get a statement from Sheila about how she found out the answer to the question, etc. Above all, she never expects Sheila to do anything else than answer: Sheila is not held accountable for initiating any of the sub-sequences. The dialogue between mother and child is submitted to a kind of meta-rule stating that any statement within the dialogue is not intended to lead to any other practical act than a display of knowledge marked as such. Given the multiplicity of tasks that the Farrells are involved in at the same time that afternoon, we have examples of different kinds of dialogues which highlight the specific properties of the "homework" style. Look, for example, at the three-part dialogue initiated by Sheila about Maura the baby (Fa-19 to 25). Eventually it involves all four participants around the issue of redirecting Maura's attention. It is obvious that the practical goal of this exchange is not a marked display of the knowledge that we can assume all these participants do have about the legitimacy of

Sheila's request about the fact that Mrs. Farrell's primary responsibility is to Sheila, about the fact that the father is more than welcome to enter at this stage, etc. The father, for example, obviously knows a lot about what is going on. But he does not have to display this knowledge. What he must do is take the baby away. On the other hand, Sheila--within homework sequences--must, above all, display knowledge. She demonstrates her agreement with the definition of the scene by fully participating in it within the confines of her role: she gives answers, she elaborates at appropriate times, etc.

The same kind of analysis can be performed with the Kinneys. There, mother and child are involved in a dialogue from the onset. Joe is never on his own. But, like Sheila he is asked knowledge display questions and answers them. The relation between him and his mother is repeatedly marked linguistically as unequal and symmetrical: Mrs. Kinney initiates, he completes, she acknowledges the ending of the sequence. This is true of the whole sequence (Mrs. Kinney decides that it is now time to do homework and, later, that it is over) and of all the homework subsequences within the scene. It is striking, for example, that the coupons sequence, one of the more interesting non-homework sequences within the hour, is in fact initiated by Joe (Kb-). He is the one who picks up the coupons and addresses his mother about it: "There's a coupon, ma. Save 20¢" (Kb-1). After checking what he is doing, Mrs. Kinney continues the search through his bookbag, but she picks up the new topic in a way that suggests that she is looking for information rather than simply testing his knowledge. She does not know what the coupons are for as is revealed by the fact that, when he mispronounces, she must look at the coupon to correct him (Kb-8 to 13). Things change in the second stage of the coupons sequence. After Joe has put them down, she asks him while pointing at them on the table: "And Key Food has double coupons, right?" (Kb-15). Interestingly, Joe takes this question as a further question about points of information: "I think they stopped the double" (Kb-18). This answer in fact corresponds most exactly to her question from the point of view of linguistic cohesion. Her second restatement of the question "so you get double that" (Kb-17) suggests that she is in fact in a homework frame of reference. But she returns to dealing with Joe about information and it is he, eventually, who states the question in homework form: "What would be the double of 12¢?" (Kb-22). This establishes the frame. Central to this frame is the fact that Mrs. Kinney is not the one to answer such a question. She looks at him, but she stays silent and he adopts his role: "six" (Kb-23). From then on the exchange follows the canonical form and Joe arrives at the correct answer.

The spotlighting of the individual, in such scenes, is clearly a subtle matter. But it is definitely a performed action that is redundantly accomplished through various means. The knowledge that is to be displayed is the child's. The parent's role is an eliciting one. The child is the subject of the sequence: it remains, throughout HIS (or HER) homework.

3. Secondary spotlight on family

As we just emphasized, to say that the homework is primarily a particular child's scene is not to say that the rest of the family is not involved in setting up this scene. On the contrary. If the whole family did not participate

in the identification of the scene, it could not be organized as it must be. The family has a responsibility, and this responsibility is acknowledged. This is evidenced by the interest that these families do take in their child's homework. Both families spend a lot of energy on insuring that homework gets done, and it does get done. They are also aware, as they told us in interview situations, that the quality of the work that their children bring back to school reflects on themselves as parents and as persons. They are aware that there are good ways and bad ways of doing homework and that these are supposed to be reflected in the child's success.

Such matters rarely surface during the two tapes. But it is probable that Mrs. Farrell's biting of her finger after Sheila repeats an error she has been making and has just been told to correct is relevant to this secondary spotlighting. During the "consonant blend" sequence, and after it was settled that Sheila was going to correct her mistake, Mrs. Farrell makes a hesitating statement of the rule: "A consonant blend is two consonants at the beginning of-uh-thing" (Fa-18). It is not impossible that this hesitation is related to her knowledge that we were watching her. But later, things get sharper. Sheila is back in her position; Mrs. Farrell asks her to find three more consonant blends and Sheila says: "F.E." (Fa-27). She corrects herself immediately. But it is too late. Mrs. Farrell proceeds with a long dramatic movement that eventually includes all participants, including those behind the camera, as she says: "Ah, you got it right on the tape, I swear to God" (Fa-28). She may simply be apologizing for Sheila. But Sheila is not made accountable to do anything during the time, except to look down contritely--which she does. This at least suggests that Mrs. Farrell's "it" is to be taken as broadly as it is ambiguous. The "it" we got on tape is not simply Sheila's error about a consonant blend. It most probably has to do with her failing to incorporate an explanation. It may also be a commentary on her unwillingness to correct herself. But it may also have to do with Mrs. Farrell's own responsibility. She is the one who is apologizing, and she does not request Sheila to do so. The latter in fact never suggests that the camera is embarrassing her.

Whichever behavior or person is in fact referred to in Mrs. Farrell's "it," the apology itself only makes sense in a system in which there are certain behaviors for which one can apologize because one is responsible for them. But, besides connoting personal responsibility, the apology constitutes a kind of person to whom the apology is addressed. It is not chance that Mrs. Farrell's "you" is accompanied by a surveying movement encompassing Vera Hamid and Paul Byers. She is not apologizing to her husband. Rather she is including him in an apology addressed to symbolic representatives of the educational institution. The spotlight that illuminates the child is held by the parents in homework scenes. But the parents know that the school holds them responsible for the manner in which they hold this spotlight.

The strong relationship of schooling with evaluation has been recognized many times. The fact that teachers evaluate parents is also well known. But we also know that this evaluation is not of the same order as the evaluation that is made of children. When children bring their homework back to school, they get a grade that becomes part of their official bureaucratic history. Parents do not get grades. Their relationship with teachers is indirect. They are in the background, in a kind of secondary spotlight. It is significant that Mrs.

Farrell's apology is done in a joking mode. Even though we, as observers, were identified as the school, it was also evident that our actions following this "mistake" would not have any formal impact.

What is interesting about all this is what it reveals about the exact relationship of families to school. Schools enter families through the necessity for families to do homework together. But to say this is not sufficient if it is not understood as implying that the school, through homework, structures family interaction by redundantly separating the child from his parents and siblings. Both the child and the family entourage are acted upon by the reactions of the school to their collective behavior. But this action, by its very organization, differentiates roles within the family. To this extent, families are not free to organize homework. They are radically constrained.

4. The tasks of focus are suggested by the school

This again, is something that may seem too obvious to be worth emhasizing as a distinctive feature of "homework." But even if we simply look at the word itself we can recognize that powerful symbolic processes are at work. According to the normal rules for the formation of compound words in English, "homework" should be "the work of the home," work related to the home--in the same manner as "housework" is the "work related to maintaining a house." But "homework," in educational contexts, is clearly work related to the school. The "home" aspect of homework refers to a location of this school work, and to a pattern of social responsibility for immediate control of the children. But the home has precisely not the responsibility of generating this work. It is not related to the maintenance of its own structure. Indeed, part of the work which families must perform in relation to homework concerns the reestablishment of an organization around something that is imposed on it.

The "schoolness" of homework is indeed something which the families must perform. After all, schools may expect families to do certain things, but the families--and in fact not all do it--must then do these things. It is thus not surprising that the pattern of this activity should be so strong that when improvising around the prescribed theme of "homework" the school, in content and structure, should reappear. While we did not plan to tape a family "playing" homework for us in the absence of a school assignment, the fact that the Kinneys in fact did not have any homework the evening we taped them is particularly precious. We could not have designed a better projective test.

As mentioned in the general historical account of the Kinney scene, this was the first night in weeks that Joe had not been assigned homework by his school. Besides giving him an excuse to play with his friends without telling his mother about it, it radically confused Mrs. Kinney. This confusion itself would reveal the power of the school. Ann Morison's solution (that Mrs. Kinney go over Joe's work for the day at school) makes sense in the same symbolic manner and resolved Mrs. Kinney's dilemma as to what to do. It is fully coherent, but it placed the school back at the center of the evening. It also meant that Mrs. Kinney had to be active in a somewhat different manner than she usually was. Not only had she to organize the social environment for Joe to do "his" homework, she also had to create the tasks to fill the scene. In other words,

the situation that evening obliged her to assume the teacher role as well as the mother role. Throughout, we see her hesitate between the two: she feeds Joe, she disciplines him, she seeks information from him about his day, about his reading of coupons, etc. But she also questions him, composes problems for him to solve and evaluates his performance. As we showed when we discussed the "coupons sequence" in the context of the spotlighting of the child, a task that the child suggests cannot be incorporated as such within homework: although a child can, physically, ask a homework-like question (Kb-22), it does not produce a reversal of the roles. Rather, it leads to a reinstatement of the basic structure: After his mother's silence, Joe answers his own question, she corrects him, etc. What is most striking about this sequence, however, is the fact that, except for the brief discussion of the double of 12, it is not incorporated within the overall task. During most of the sequence Mrs. Kinney continues to look into Joe's book bag. Even when they engage each other around the doubling of 12, she remains poised, interrupted in her writing of long divisions which she has been copying from work Joe did that day in school. Her last question: "So how much would you get back on that coupon?" (Kb-32) remains unanswered and she does not hold Joe accountable for his silence. She moves on to the business of the night: school work.

This centrality of the school raises interesting questions about the exact relevance of homework to education. It is certain that Joe displays a great functional competence about daily life in his handling of the coupons. He knows what they are for, where you can use them. His hesitations seem to suggest that he knew that 6 is not the double of 12 even before his mother corrected him. Certainly also, an inspired teacher could have made much of the coupons as a prop for a lesson grounded in the everyday life of these people. But the coupons are part of "housework," not of "homework." And the educational potential of these coupons remains implicit rather than explicit. The symbolic stress is on school-like tasks and those are where the participants turn next.

5. The beginning and end of homework scenes and sequences

When we talked about the specialness of homework as a scene within other scenes which families perform, we talked necessarily of the beginnings and endings of homework within these families. As we saw, the boundaries are strictly maintained and redundantly performed during the whole scene particularly, as necessarily happens, when other scenes are performed concurrently with the homework. But another interesting aspect of homework is the fact that these beginnings and endings are secondary to the primary beginnings and endings which, not surprisingly, are performed outside of the family and within the school. It is a teacher that begins a homework routine by "assigning" tasks to be performed. Without such a marker, there is no "homework" to be done. In other words, it is not the family itself which generates homework. Even among the Kinneys, it is an outside prompt that motivates Mrs. Kinney and Joe. In the absence of a camera crew, there would have been no homework that night in this home. Similarly the families only perform temporary endings. When a child says "I am finished," and when parents agree, the scene ends as far as the family is concerned. But all the participants also know that this ending is conditional. It is a teacher which will make it final by grading the homework, filing the grade and moving on.

We were able to tape only one absolute beginning and no endings to homework scenes. Mrs. Kinney's "Let's see what you have Joe" (Ka-1) by itself already reiterates many of the matters we have already mentioned: it is Joe that "has" something, but both he and she will have to "see" (do the homework). Mrs. Kinney starts, Joe follows. In fact this organization is redundantly used throughout the scenes as sequences and subsequences are performed. Mrs. Kinney, when she is finally satisfied that she has played her part and that it is time for Joe to become symbolically active restates "Let's do the math first" (Kc-1). With this their basic positioning changes, and he begins to write.

Among the Farrells, there are less explicit beginnings partially because, as we show later, there are less interruptions requiring new beginnings. But, among them too, it is clear that it is Mrs. Farrell who is in charge of the joint progression through the workbook. She is the one who turns the pages, signs her initials and moves on. She is the one who prods Sheila when she spots an error and holds her accountable for answering. The basic sequence is best exemplified by the following exchange (Fa-31 to 33).

Mrs. F.: What's a consonant blend?

Sheila: Ah, F.R.

Mrs. F.: Right

We refer to any such exchange as directly displaying the "canonical" form of homework. The canonical form is the symbolic foil in terms of which actual exchanges are interpreted. These exchanges are extremely varied. For example, Mrs. Farrell's "right" can take the form of [silence] as it does when Sheila continues (Fa-34, 35):

Sheila: B.L., right

C.O., no

S.T., ehhh

It can take the summary form: "Well you are very good at this" (Fa-40) and is made complete with Mrs. Farrell's signature on the page.

The possibility of errors complicates the performance of the basic sequence since Sheila is held accountable for getting it right. Thus the beginning of the consonant blend sequence is made up of three simple recycles of the two first stages of the structure (Fa-2 to 6). It is as if Mrs. Farrells' expectable "Wrong!" had been replaced by her restatement of the initial statement which, in its new position gains a different communicational value. In fact, it is not clear that Sheila immediately gets the message and the matter escalates until her father states the fundamental principle: "You are not [going to leave it wrong]" (Fa-15). Sheila is not given the power to terminate a homework sequence. Only her parents and, after her parents, her teachers, may terminate it. Even if this is done by default, as happens when Mrs. Farrell decides that she is not able to check the accuracy of questions concerning the length of vowels, the constraints that make her apologize for it can only be understood in terms of

structural constraints that give her the temporary responsibility of terminating sequences.

6. A summary structural model

It might be helpful, at this stage, to formalize the preceding analysis by means of a structural model of what it is in homework that the families do not control. This highlights the interactional properties of homework scenes and allows us to understand how the families can exploit these properties to achieve their own agenda and how, conversely, they are constrained by these properties. Before we proceed, we must however stress that such a model must be taken as an analytic construct, not as a representational picture. The model is grounded in observations of real actions, but it is oriented to a different purpose than this action itself. By its very nature as an analytic tool, the model has the property of appearing mechanical and reversible. It depicts a whole at one time. In the real time of social interaction, most features of the model are potentialities to be performed in an uncertain future. This is a point that has been strongly emphasized by Bourdieu (1977) and we are careful to analyze the actual scenes we look at in terms of achievements within temporal linearity. But this perspective itself has the property of making observers blind to what makes the interactional power of our actions: the fact that they are inscribed within broader ensembles which define them as actions of a particular kind.

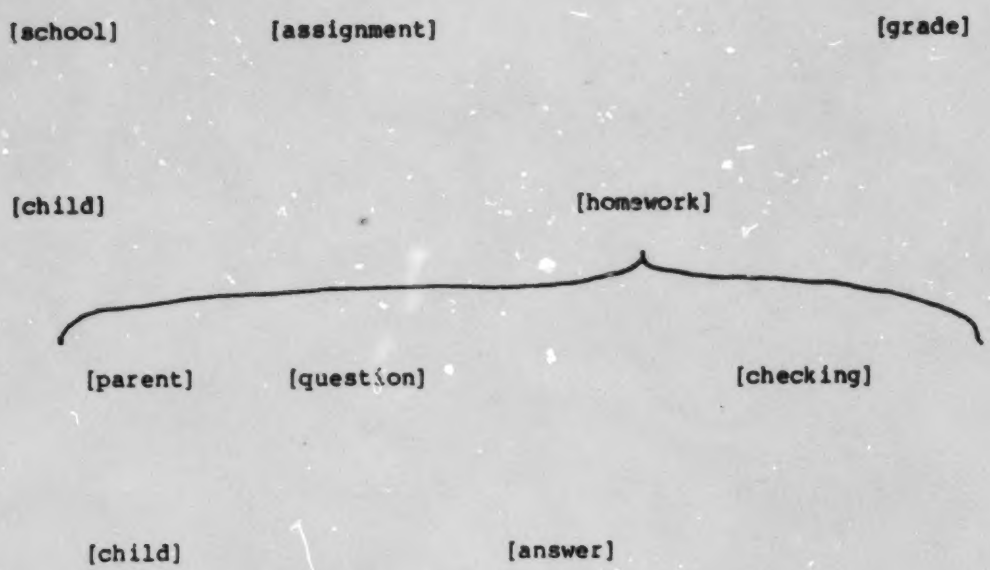
In summary then: Homework scenes have a definite shape. They must involve at least two protagonists, that of 'evaluator' and 'evaluated' placed in symmetrical, but differentiated roles. The interaction itself necessarily involves a three step sequence: question, answer, evaluation. This can be represented as follows:

/evaluator/ /question/ /evaluation/

/evaluated/ /answer/

This in fact is the general structure of classroom talk (Griffin and Humphrey, 1978; Mehan, 1979a. Our analysis does not rely on or require the detail of the classroom turn-taking literature). As we see in greater detail later, it is only to the extent that an utterance that can take many different propositional forms is placed within this structure that it gains its specific force as "something that makes sense within homework" and thereby has a certain kind of power.

We have also seen that, within the specific context of homework this general structure is a two level event which has the following general shape:



This makes clear how homework stands at the intersection between the family and the school. The school, in homework, replicates itself within the family and controls what happens there. But this replication can only go so far since the family, after all, is precisely defined by the school as not being itself (by not allowing parents the authority to grade for example). This is of course reciprocally enacted. Such interactional properties of homework as a whole can thus help us understand both what it is that families do with it and also the specific kinds of conflict that they have about it, both among themselves, and with the school.

Finally a model like this reveals the necessity of asking a radical question: What does all this have to do with education? Homework is organized as a school knowledge display scene for purposes of evaluation. There is no definite suggestion that in homework children learn. At best they display a knowledge that they have acquired elsewhere and "elsewhen." In no sense can we say that our children learn through their families by doing homework, at least in terms of what it is that the families do not control. Could it be that they learn by having to perform, through homework scenes, but relatively independently of what makes so, their particular family's scenes as these are transformed by what it is that the families do control? Let us look.

C. WHAT THE FARRELLS AND THE KINNEYS DO CONTROL

In the preceding pages we have summarized the structural properties of all the homework scenes which we observed in our families and in fact, as far as we can tell of all homework scenes that we might observe in Western school-oriented societies. This is the theme on which the families improvised. To the extent that our families had to improvise on this theme, they were all alike. But they were also all different in very significant ways. These differences are the object of the following analysis. We focus on five matters that are

particularly striking as differences: 1) the sequencing of the homework scene with other familial scenes ("external sequencing"); 2) the sequencing of the various homework related subsequences within the homework itself ("internal sequencing"); 3) the relating of the two kinds of sequences ("intrusions"); 4) the identification of the participants; 5) the overall qualification of the scene by the participants ("meta-evaluation"). Given that we are now talking about differences, we deal separately with the Farrells and the Kinneys within each discussion of the above matters.

1. External sequencing

a) The Farrells:

It is typical for Sheila to do her homework immediately upon her return from school as she did the day we taped her. It is also typical for her mother to check it immediately after. There is no need for much prompting on the part of the parents. Sheila is expected to perform most of the work by herself, and this is what she does. Nobody is assigned to help her. Other participants are engaged in other activities. Even at the time of "checking" we still have all the participants engaged in a multitude of activities which they concurrently perform to their satisfaction: they watch T.V., deal with the baby, etc. The homework, while preserving its identity as a special task, is not segregated, nor are the participants segregated.

All the participants in the overall family scene are all directly involved in all the activities. As mentioned, both Mrs. Farrell and Sheila follow the soap opera on T.V. And both Mr. Farrell and Maura, the baby, keep track of the homework. At various times Mr. Farrell participates in prompting Sheila (Fa-15; Fb-16, 18, 57). We have also the baby's little laugh which echoes her mother after it has been settled that Sheila in fact is good at consonant blends. Sheila has said twice: "That's right" (Fa-40 and 41). Between the two, Mrs. Farrell has shook her head once while laughing in a movement that could be glossed poetically as that of the loving mother who proudly reprimands her daughter for a self-assurance which she recognizes as grounded. This is a good moment and the baby joins. The baby laughs, Sheila and the baby look at each other, and Sheila falls into rhythmic song for her sister (Fa-42).

It is also striking that the shifts from any of the scenes that are performed in parallel with the dominant homework (e.g., "taking care of the baby") never seem to constitute real "interruptions" of any of the scenes. The baby, we have suggested, is not on her own while her mother and sister are involved with homework. She is very much with them even though, obviously, there is no structural part for her to play in the homework as a prescribed scene. At any time when she must be handled, it is necessary for homework relevant activities to be, albeit extremely briefly, suspended. While singing to her sister, Sheila is obviously not "doing" homework. But at the precise moment when she sings, she would not have to do anything else than wait and her mother, who is now "on" (from the point of view of homework), is continuing the checking process. Similarly, Mrs. Farrell does give repeated glances in the direction of the baby. These are always given at such times when she turns pages, waits for an answer from Sheila, etc. When the baby begins to get

rearranged in the spot Sheila occupies (when this one leaves the couch to go get the eraser), the subsequent rearrangement back into the basic positioning occurs extremely smoothly as Sheila comes back, hands Mrs. Farrell the eraser and sits down: none of the participants' motions are interrupted.

b) The Kinneys:

Homework, for Joe Kinney, is typically a two stage affair of which we only taped a reconstitution of the second stage. On a normal day, Joe upon his return from school and after a snack sits down to begin his homework under the supervision of his grandmother who takes care of the children until Mrs. Kinney comes back from work. According to all reports, the family's as well as the fieldworker's, this first stage is characterized by 1) a struggle between Joe and the grandmother about the need to perform the homework rather than go out and play with friends and 2) the tendency of the grandmother to do parts of Joe's homework for him "sometimes in her own handwriting." Mrs. Kinney, who told us about this, has a running battle with her mother on the issue of letting Joe do the homework by himself. Joe generally wins the struggle with his grandmother. Stage 2 begins upon the return to the family home. Mrs. Kinney now begins to check what Joe had to do, what he still has to do and proceeds to help him complete the work. This is not always successful and may last till late in the evening. The length of this procedure is partially the product of the fact that Mrs. Kinney, at the same time she checks Joe's homework must also prepare and eat her own meal, keep track of the sister's activities, catch up with the children about their day, touch base with other members of her network, etc. It is clear that the pressures on such a single working mother as Mrs. Kinney are extreme and that she is struggling mightily.

Given this background, it may not seem surprising that homework among the Kinneys is not quite as smooth an affair as it appears to be among the Farrells. It still remains necessary to show exactly how this struggle is conducted. One of the most striking features of this struggle may be its sheer length. We have observations and self-reports about the exhausting nature of homework in the family. We have also mentioned the tension which it creates between Mrs. Kinney and her own mother, on whom she must rely but whom she does not trust with homework. In all this Joe does not have much to say. But he seems very good at passive resistance. Altogether, homework among the Kinneys is a particularly unpleasant affair. At the scale which we have adopted in this chapter, it is easy to see the working out of these processes. In terms of external sequencing, these pervasive difficulties are performed through the problems the people have in dealing with the other scenes they must perform in parallel to the homework. The usual versions of these scenes were not all performed the evening we were there. But there were at least two others that had to be dealt with. The Kinneys had to deal with our presence, they had to deal with a number of telephone calls from kin and neighbors who had been alerted to look out for the missing Joe earlier that evening. Given all this, one could imagine that homework itself, as a symbolic form as well as a content, would fade. The contrary happened among the Kinneys. They highlighted the form. As the analytic transcripts reveal, the Kinneys adopted a particularly rigid homework positioning, and they had to spend a lot of energy maintaining this positioning in the context of all the other scenes that they also had to perform. Part of the long delay in actual starting work (by contrast to

setting things up) is caused by the constant need to reorganize the physical setting until it is symbolically proper. This being added to Mrs. Kinney's uncertainty about what to make Joe do, and the actual telephone calls, etc. accounts for the 13 minutes it did take for Joe to begin the divisions. It also suggests that the routine homework scenes are also lengthened by the inability to integrate smoothly the various scenes which the Kinneys must perform concurrently.

A striking example of this need for the preservation of symbolic form can be found in the "empty chair sequence" (Ka-). It will be remembered that, after the camera was turned on, Joe was already in his "waiting" positioning. His mother, whose responsibility it was, at this stage, to act was the one who was absent (she was dealing with the guests). Her chair was empty. During that t[illegible] Joe get up twice and is not called to order for it which justifies our assumption that, for Mrs. Kinney the scene only starts when she sits down and says: "Let's see what you have Joe" (Ka-1). At that point Joe gets up once again. This is noticed by his mother who interprets his disappearance in terms of the homework frame: "all I have to do is bend my head and he is gone" (Ka-4). In fact Joe is not necessary to the performance of Mrs. Kinney's task. If he had stayed put, he would just have to do something like stare blindly into space while she looked into his bag. We may even suspect that Mrs. Kinney eventually would have realized that Paul Byers had sat down on the floor and she herself would have gone up to get him a chair. However that may be, a lot of time is spent accounting for Joe's movements and, in the process, embarrassing both him and her as types of people who fail in certain ways. We return to this aspect of the scene later. At this time we just want to emphasize how different this way of dealing with the sequencing of homework is from other scenes.

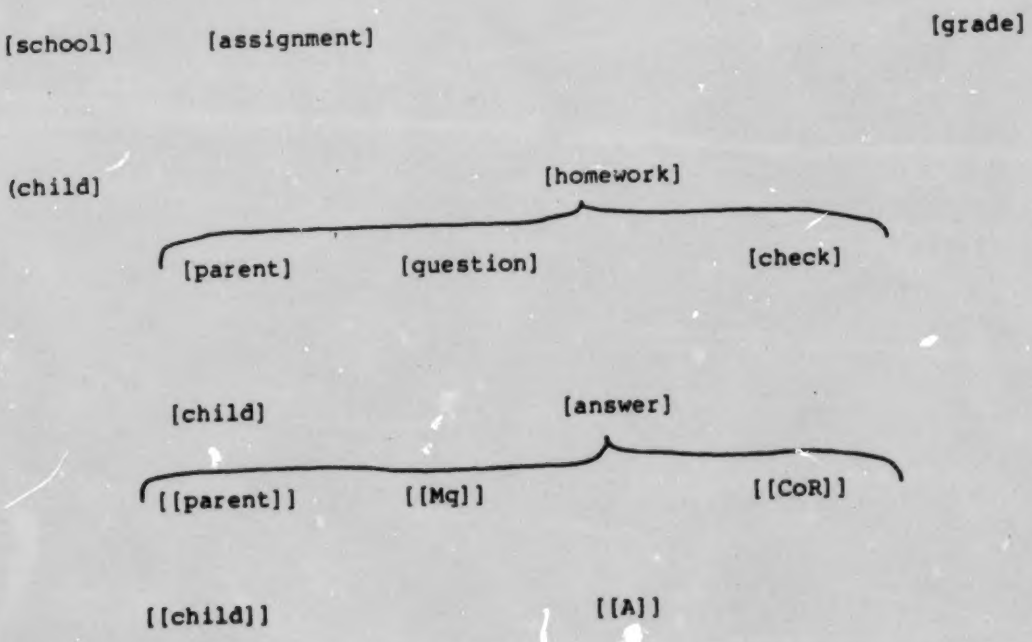
2. Internal Sequencing

Besides variations in the ways the Kinneys and the Farrells organized the parallel performance of other scenes to the homework one, there are also interesting variations in the ways they organized their own performance of the canonical homework structure which we identified as the imposed theme on which they had to improvise. At that time, we argued that the general structure /Question-Answer-Evaluation/ (/QAE/) as performed by an /evaluator/ and an /evaluated/ was realized in the context of "family," as a [(restatement of) Question-Answer-Checking] ([QAC]) sequenced performed by a [parent] and a [child]. We gave an example of the realization of this canonical sequence (Fa-31 to 33). And we mentioned superficially irregular forms triggered by Sheila's errors.

We also mentioned Mrs. Farrell's concern about the source of Sheila's "right" answers. We showed how this concern led her to perform rather complex subsequences. Readers may also have noticed her attempts at either getting Sheila to state rules that she was following or at giving her an account of the rule. A good example can be found at the heart of the consonant blend sequence (Fa-18). What we would like to mention here is that such behaviors are not structural requirements of the school imposed canonical form. They are structural aspects of the interaction of Mrs. Farrell with Sheila around homework.

From the point of view of the school, such reinforcing behavior as Mrs. Farrell engages in can only be viewed as positive. A good teacher would hope that parental help would always include such concern with the principles of performance rather than simply with the accuracy of the response. Given the utility of such reinforcement, it is thus sad to see that parents are not forced by the shape of homework to give such reinforcement. The most that parents are required to do is to insure that the child actually does his homework and then that it has been completed. Whether parental checking should include insuring that all the child's answers be right is a controversial issue. But, unless the parents themselves elaborate on the canonical sequence, there is no school controlled mechanism to help them check the grounds of the knowledge displayed. This is what makes Mrs. Farrell's involvement with such questions particularly interesting to us.

In the following model, we represent this further elaboration on the canonical form of homework as a kind of third step nested within the two main steps that are required by the school. This third step involves a question about the original question (meta-question or [[Mq]]) from the parent, an answer ([[A]]) and a check or statement of the rule ([[CoR]]). It should be noticed that, for us, what makes this elaboration on the canonical form a matter of structure among the Farrells is not simply the frequency of such behaviors as inquiries into the source of an answer or actual statements of rules. It is rather the evidence that the Farrells can perform this structure in many different ways and in many different settings. Homework among the Farrells can thus be said to have the following shape:



b) The Kinneys

There is no need to deal extensively with the presence of the canonical [QAC] structure among the Kinneys and its surface variations. What we said about it in our preceding analyses applies here too. The exchange about the coupons quoted earlier, even though it was not integrated within the homework scene, is a particularly complete instance of it. In it we see the mother appropriating Joe's question by not answering it, a cue which Joe understands as a reinstatement of the [QAC] structure, leading him to answer. This first answer is checked as wrong by Mrs. Kinney, and the subroutine is recycled. Joe finds the right answer and is rewarded by a "Right" which closes the sequence. This emphasis on 'rightness' is redundantly expressed throughout the scene and it does not systematically lead to the meta-questioning sequence typical of the Farrell's homework.

But while the [QAC] structure is very much present among the Kinneys, what is striking about them is the extent to which its performance is segmented by interruptions which break the flow. Time and time again, we see Mrs. Kinney ask a question that does not produce an answer from Joe who is not then made accountable for his silence. Time and time again we see Mrs. Kinney ask a question, get an answer from Joe and drop the sequence. Quite often, there appears to be a clear external cause to the interruption: Mrs. Kinney asks a question, and then the telephone rings. She answers it. What would seem more natural than that she would forget what her question was? But it is on the subtler events that we rely in our argument that, perhaps, it is not quite "natural" for Mrs. Kinney not to complete sequences which she started. In the coupons sequence, for example, we have at least two instances of self generated "interruptions." We can see Mrs. Kinney fail to realize that Joe has completed his interest in coupons and is now coming towards her as he focusses on the homework she is preparing for him. He is in fact so focussed on this that he has to ask her to recycle her statement (Kb-15 to 17). A few moments later we have the reverse process. Mrs. Kinney asks Joe to focus on the homework (Kb-21). But she does this with her head down while writing, and he begins dealing with the coupons which leads her to stop her writing and shift activities. Even her last request (Kb-32) seems set up to suggest that Joe does not have to answer it by its very redundancy and her return to the basic positioning as she makes it.

It is the presence of such low level events that suggest to us that there is something structural about the way Mrs. Kinney and Joe react to interruptions apparently generated by the occurence of events external to homework. After all, the Farrells also had to deal with quite a few such "external" interruptions. They too had to deal with intrusive fieldworkers and machines. But they succeeded in integrating these into the scene at appropriate times so that the actual flow of the homework was not radically disturbed. The Kinneys, on the contrary, interrupted themselves even in the absence of externally triggered events. It is as if they stuttered in the performance of the canonical homework sequences. It is as if the canonical [Q.A.C.] sequence took a form that might be displayed formally as:

[Q-.I.Q-.A-.I.A-.I.C]

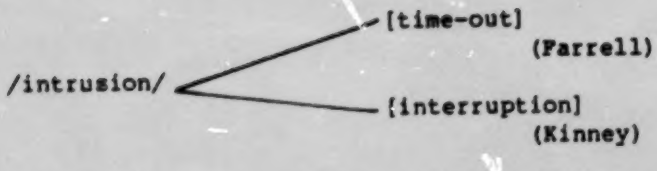
This pattern suggests differences in the manner the Farrells and the Kinneys elaborate on the basic canonical forms which is imposed on them by the school. But it also suggests that we look further at the way the entry of parallelly performed scenes ("intrusions") is handled in each family since it does not appear that they do it similarly.

3. Intrusions: Interaction between external and internal sequencing

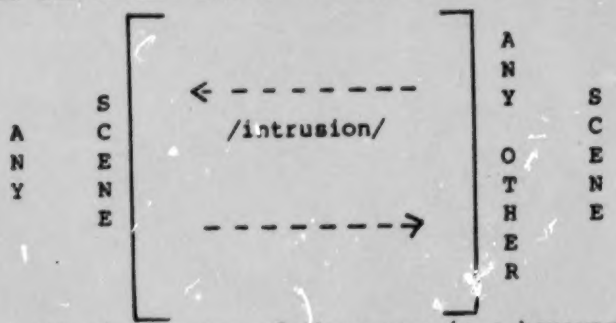
The issue of intrusions is important for our families. It is also important enough for general theoretical discussions of familial styles in education for us to feel the need to formalize our findings. We presently argue that familial tensions around homework among the Kinneys, and even possibly Joe's relative failure to keep up in school, had much to do with these intrusions-as-interruptions. But this will not be the basis for the traditional school argument that a child, when doing homework, "should" not be interrupted and "should" concentrate solely on homework and should be helped by his parents to do this. An intrusion is not necessarily an interruption, and a great concern about "interruptions" may actually be what transforms an intrusion into an interruption.

How a family deals with intrusions is of great interest first because all the families we observed conducted various scenes at the same time. Recent research on middle class families suggest that this is general. Even in school, intrusions are common as shown in McDermott's (1976) work. This confirms our feeling that intrusions are less important in themselves than in the way in which they are organized. Furthermore, to the extent that properly educational tasks are performed in all scenes families act out, the shifting in and out may not be deleterious in itself. Indeed if flexibility in ability to perform in various settings is a sign of the higher forms of education, the ability to participate smoothly across shifts could be treated as a sign of success in social, if not school, terms. It is thus important that we incorporate the organization of intrusions within our homework models of the families to help us specify more exactly the argument.

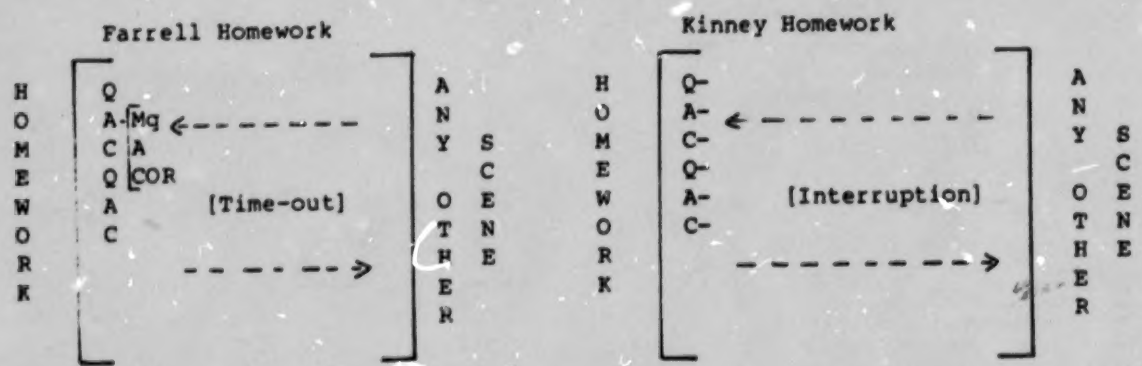
At the end of our discussion of the Kinneys' homework organization, we drew a model of this organization that makes it look very much like the canonical model except for the "stutter." By contrast to the Farrells, the Kinneys do not elaborate in any significant way on the model imposed on them by the school. They do what they must do. The Farrells, systematically, do more. This obviously differentiates the Farrells from the Kinneys. So do the external sequencing of the scene and, as we are now emphasizing, the mechanisms that link this internal sequencing with the external one. Among both the Farrells and the Kinneys this is an issue given the number of scenes that are performed in parallel. Both have to deal with the intrusions within a scene from sequences related to other concurrent scenes. Among the Farrells, for example, taking care of the baby intrudes into the homework scene, and the homework itself intruded into that other scene. But all such intrusions were handled during naturally occurring "time-outs" in the homework requirements for performance for any participant:



This means that a model of the homework scene in the context of the other scenes that is its normal context should look like the following:



This can be realized when one of the scene is a homework scene as (in the further context of the Farrells and Kinneys):



4. Identification of the participants

Until now we have focused strictly on the joint performances of the homework scenes and have left in the background the question of the differentiation of the participants within the scene. When talking about what the families do not control we did mention that the very structure of homework makes it necessary for the participants to take different though symmetrical and complementary roles. This symmetry is obviously jointly produced, and redundantly reproduced throughout the scene as one person asks a question and another answers it. This structural differentiation itself also allows for the families to elaborate further by loading the differentiating elements of the sequences with other matters that go beyond the matter of deciding whether the child knows the answer or whether the parent has helped him appropriately. In other words, it is not simply the child's academic competence that is brought to focus during homework scene, but the identification of the child and the parent as persons of a particular kind.

Most research has approached this issue from the point of view of the concept of "identity." In such research, the concept is understood as a psychological event produced by early socialization and then stabilized and substantialized. What we want to capture, on the other hand, is something that is constantly being jointly produced through interaction and thus requires constant work (J. McDermott, 1976; McDermott and Church, 1976). Given the danger inherent in using a label ("Identity") that has strong psychological connotations in common parlance, we talk here of the identification of the participants as this is one revealed in the organization of the interactions and in the label which the participants may then give each other. We prefer to think of identification as of a kind of rhetorical process (Burke, 1969) through which people place each other within positions and symbolic categories. The variations that we can observe in this identification are interesting for theoretical reasons. They are also interesting because we feel that it is around this issue of identification that so much of the suffering that can accompany the performances of the most routine of scenes can be understood to arise.

a) The Farrells

Several things can be immediately said about the Farrell's mutual identifications:

Sheila:
- She is held on a short leash: she is continually held accountable for getting it right and doing it as required. Eventually she gets it and does it right;
- She repeatedly gets rebuked;
- She repeatedly gets praised in a half reluctant manner that she amplifies with no rejoinders from her parents;
- She does not hesitate to affirm her competence whenever her mother gives her a chance;
- She repeatedly gets involved in half joning interactions around serious matters which re-affirm the need to perform the matter adequately and the fact that it is not particularly onerous to do it.

Mrs. Farrell:
- She holds the leash and orchestrates the scene. She is the one who initiates sequences, invites people to join and terminate deviations from the scene. When she rebukes her husband's tease, it is through a threat to abdicate her directorship of the scene;
- She assumes the involvement of the baby as an audience;
- She involves her husband by looking at him at significant moments;

- She affirms herself as the competent one, the final arbiter of the academically right and wrong. On the one occasion when she affirms her incompetence, it is done in a challenging manner.

Mr. Farrell:
- He is the general surveyor, the interested outsider;
- He does not get involved in matters of academic competence;
- He intervenes to help with the social organization of the scene by doing such things as
  a) distracting the baby
  b) calling Sheila to order (he is the disciplinarian of last resort, the one who gives imperative commands to Sheila).

It should be noted once again that these differentiated characteristics of the participants--while they constitute what makes them different from each other--are controlled by the reactions of their mutual reactions to each other. They "are" not. They are <u>let</u> be. Let us see how these things are worked out in the "pail" sequence.

Just before this sequence, Mrs. Farrell had been in a kind of huff: She had decided she could not check one page in the work and she had snapped at her husband who had teased her. Sheila and her father had been pacifying Mrs. Farrell in various ways which ended with Sheila kissing her mother's arm in an affectionate manner. Mrs. Farrell does not outwardly respond, but Sheila's first statement (Fb-1) is made in a relaxed fashion. It is a strong affirmation of intent which is rebuked firmly (Fb-2). After a brief confusion--and with no protest from Sheila--they proceed to completing the assignment. It is immediately evident that Sheila does not know what she is doing. Her mother mocks her: "Pail is a shield. That's good" (Fb-14). Sheila gets the hint and proceeds. Mr. Farrell gets interested, moves in, and makes a suggestion (Fb-18), but he mostly watches as his wife interrogates Sheila. When it gets clear that Sheila is looking to her mother for the answer (and only secondarily relying on her understanding of the task), Mrs. Farrell comments about it to her husband (Fb-31). While Sheila searches, both parents get involved in reorganizing the baby. While Mrs. Farrell takes the primary responsibility of pulling the baby from the television (thereby preventing her husband from doing it), he echoes her verbal order. It is clear that he may be involved in disciplining. This is even clearer when Sheila decides to defend her idea that "pail" is a synonym for "shield." Given her sensitivity to signals about the rightness of answers, we may assume that she must have realized immediately that "pail" was not the right answer, but she proceeds to imagine a context in which a pail might be used as a shield: "It goes over your head when you play +++" (Fb-56). This is a joke. Her parents acknowledge it implicitly, but Mr. Farrell brings her back to the order of the moment with a gentle pat on the head and a definitive though by now redundant statement: "That's not right" (Fb-57). The scene ends with half smiles from all and a smug "I'm so smart" (Fb-65) from Sheila. Her mother's retort is sarcastic. It is not a simple affirmation. But neither is it a denial. It is more like a slightly peevish "don't get too big for your

breeches" statement. The peevishness then allows Sheila to rebuke her mother who has taken the book away too fast and too early: "Come on. I didn't write it" (Fb-67).

Sheila is, thus, constantly put in the position of being (al)right. Even when she has made a mistake, it is permissible to make a joke around it that allows a display of a recognized meta-knowledge. This meta-knowledge is not quite sufficient; the right answer, in the narrowest sense, has to be produced and put down on paper. But there is no assumption that Sheila will not get it right. As Mrs. Farrell says several times "you better [do it right]" (or equivalent sentences). But she expects Sheila will do it. Sheila knows this too and is acting accordingly. Mrs. Farrell knows she knows, and they can all play with this knowledge. Indeed, by all accounts in interviews with the fieldworker, the Farrells are confident of Sheila's capacities.

b) The Kinneys

Things are very different here. From the beginning of the study we were told emphatically that Joe's competence was problematic. In a rather pathetic way Mrs. Kinney told us that "some people have it and others don't" and that Joe, "like herself," and by comparison to the older daughter, were among those that "didn't have it." This is all the more paradoxical, to us, since Joe's teacher, when we interviewed her, did not think that Joe had any serious problems. When Joe was tested in depth it was found that he indeed did not have any serious strictly academic problem. As we discuss later, Mrs. Kinney found it extremely difficult to incorporate such good news within her overall identification of Joe. This may in fact be because this negative identification was so redundantly performed within all routine scenes within the family, particularly around homework.

The scene which we now look at occurs after Mrs. Kinney and Joe have finally settled on the task of doing long division. For some time, Joe has been working on division with only minimal comments from his mother. Then she gets agitated. She writes something on a piece of paper which she covers up. She then looks at Joe, looks back at her paper, back at Joe, back at her paper before verbalizing in a hesitating fashion (Kc-16):

Mrs. K: Um
Joe
Could you explain to me
something

Earlier on (Kc-8 to 15), Mrs. Kinney had already raised the issue of her own competence. Then Joe had asked: "Do I have to check it?" (Kc-13). Now he answers his mother by asserting: "I'll check it" (Kc-19). Thus his statement is more cohesive to something he said much earlier than to his mother's immediate question. That one looked like a request for a statement of the rule Joe is following. Joe doesn't answer this question and is not called to order for it. It may be that he is right in answering to a thinly disguised challenge "Did you do it right?" It may be that we have here an instance of the stuttering process we described earlier. And it may be that both processes are going on. It is

interesting that people who listen to the tape cannot agree as to whether Mrs. Kinney's next utterance (Kc-20) is "I know" or "I don't know." It may in fact be that this confusion is well constructed and reflects Mrs. Kinney's own uncertainty. Either way, Joe treats her utterance as a probe for reassurance. Given Mrs. Kinney's next utterance (Kc-22), it is in fact possible that he does not simply want to defend his own competence, but also his mother's who comes back for a second time about the issue of "doing it differently." Joe says in effect: **"You do it one way, I do it another. Either way it'll come out alright." ("It's my own way of how I do it" [Kc-25].) This is grasped by the fieldworker who asks a meta-question. This is superficially the same as the first one and is treated with the same disregard as when Mrs. Kinney states that she has found "where your boo boo is" (Kc-25). This is followed by a struggle between mother and child as to who is right. This struggle is eventually solved in favor of the child.

What makes this scene painful to watch is that, in the process, the focus has been placed on the probability that both the participants do not know. Neither are sure that they know or that the other knows. Since the homework scene structure places the primary spotlight on the child, it is Joe's competence that is thus constantly worried about. But Mrs. Kinney's competence is also at issue. She, of course, is not expected to give the answer, Joe is and we see him performing this role quite appropriately. But he defends himself against Mrs. Kinney's challenges and, in so doing, accepts the fact that there is an appropriate challenge.

This struggle over uncertain competence is the same one that was fought over Joe's disappearance to get a chair for Paul Byers, the "empty chair" sequence (Ka-). We mentioned it briefly in the context of the problems the Kinneys had with sequencing homework. But the scene is also a particularly stark instance of the problems they also had with the manner they identified each other. Joe was first made "the one who disappears" (**"who cannot be trusted," **"who must be called to order"). He is then made "the good host" as Mrs. Kinney makes herself "the rotten hostess" (Ka-12).

Since Mrs. Kinney has the formal power in the interaction, it is tempting to blame her for placing Joe (and herself) in such unpleasant positions. But, of course Joe participates. He does disappear when his mother is looking for him and we must assume that he both knows 1) that his mother is looking for him, and 2) that she will punish him for not doing what she expects him to do. Given the flow of the scene, we feel assured that both Mrs. Kinney and her son are suffering, but what triggers their suffering is so well organized that they cannot grasp it to change it.

Not only are the Kinneys unable to control the patterning of their own identifications, it is also probable that they are not aware of most of its underlying properties. We are thinking here in particular about the fact that the linguistic organization of the utterances through which they jointly perform these identifications have the symbolic power of directing their attention to each of them individually, substantively and independently. When Mrs. Kinney says, "You're a good host. I'm a rotten hostess," both the use of the personal pronouns and the paradigmatic verb of substantiation "to be" reinforce the identification as a personal (rather than joint) identification. The Kinneys

(and the Farrells of course) never say "We can't do this." They only say "I (you) can't do this." And they never refer their difficulties to the problems they have organizing their mutual lives in a positive manner. They rather say, as we mentioned earlier, "He doesn't have it" and "I do not have it."

We emphasize this "individualism" (the single person as independent subject responsible for actions because of inner qualities) to link this analysis to our preceding analysis of spotlighting in homework scenes, to link it to forthcoming analyses of the relationship between local routinized scenes and broad cultural patterns. Above all we want to re-emphasize that such individualism is a social, interactional accomplishment.

5. Meta-identification

The identification of the participants in the scene is something that is rather subtle at the scale we have adopted at this stage. It is essentially a matter of the manner the overall constraints over the families are handled in their fine grain. It is a matter of the exact choice of words and rhetorical constructions, a matter of the more or less explicit asides that constitute a kind of running commentary on what is going on. Even less visible within the scene unless one is alerted to find it by observations made at other scales in other scenes is a series of what we label "meta-identifications" in order to stress how these serve to identify for all the participants their overall evaluation of their life and of its place within their communities. We focus mostly on the families' evaluations of their relations with their children's school, particularly as it concerns the evaluations these schools make of the children. But the issue is a broader one that concerns matters as apparently diverse as the ethnic identification of the families or the typification of their biographies within the set of possible biographies within their community. We have shown earlier, in the chapters where we considered the relationship of these families to their communities, that these diverse matters are not in fact so miscellaneous as they seem and that it is very important to understand their impact upon what the families can in fact do.

To illustrate what we are talking about here and the kind of difficulties that confront us, we first discuss briefly the issue of ethnicity both because it is of general theoretical interest and because of the way the families expressed what they considered "their" ethnicity. Given the extent of the quotes we have already made from the two scenes we taped, it should come as no surprise that we could not identify much that is explicitly "Irish" among these families. It is not to deny that this Irishness was not there in ways that we cannot detect. What is certain is that this Irishness does not impose itself on the observer in quite the same manner as the facts that the scene is "homework," or the fact that Joe is treated as "probably dumb," assert themselves. The Irishness of these families asserts itself in two main ways: first, the performances of specifically "ethnic" scenes that can range from an answer to a question like "what is your ethnic background?", to participation in St. Patrick's Day's event, to boundary maintenance activities performed when differentiation from an interlocutor in ethnic terms is necessary (as happened regularly among the Farrells given that one sister of Mrs. Farrell was married to a Polish man and another was engaged to a Puerto-Rican man). It also asserts

Irish symbols (shamrocks, prayers, etc.). These were not so much performed as they were "just there." In that sense the homework within these families was "Irish" because it occurred in a physical setting that said, non-verbally but very distinctly, "This is Irish-American land." And so of course was it Irish because of the fact that, at any time, the overall identification "We are Irish-Americans" could be made. By definition then, for the families, anything they did was Irish, even though that Irishness was not redundantly performed.

The same thing could also be said of the fact that these families identified themselves as "Catholic," "Democrat," and a host of other labels of the same order. These labels, as we insisted in the chapter on families and community, are themselves in fact provided by their social environment as things with which they must deal. Ethnicity, religion, political affiliation are all things about which anybody who lives in the United States must do something about. What actually is done can vary. Indeed it is expected that these things should vary. But one cannot help having to relate one's personal or familial actions to the labels. It is clear for example that the Farrells and the Kinneys related themselves to their Irishness very differently. The Farrells are striking to us, to their kin and acquaintances and, we suspect, to themselves, too, because they also display, among all the Irish markers, a highly marked "Black" marker in the form of the calendar which we mentioned earlier. This is a calendar that would never have been displayed among the Kinneys, and it reveals something about the Farrells identification of themselves as "socially aware" if not outrightly radical within a conservative community.

We discussed at great length the overwhelming relevance of this racial identification for all the Farrells in general, and for Sheila's literacy in particular. At this stage we simply want to suggest that an identification of this kind, though it can lead to massive performances at other times and places than homework scenes (as it did when Mrs. Farrell joined in a sit-in in a local fire-house), is not specifically performed within such scenes except in extremely subtle forms, if at all. The same is true of the families' identification of every aspect of their relation to the school: their identification of their child's overall success, their identification of the teacher's teaching and of the teacher's own identification of the child (as revealed in report cards and other such reports of a child's progress as made to the parents), their identification of the school as a whole, their identification of the value of education as a means to successful and satisfying adult life. All the families, in settings where we could focus them on any of these topics, could build statements about all of them.

We are thus dealing here with a kind of "hidden agenda" that is potentially accessible at any time and, in this sense, is part of every performance but cannot quite be identified within the details of this performance. The identifications we are talking about about overriding, "meta-" events.

a) The Farrells

It is agreed among the Farrells that Mrs. Farrell is the academically capable one and that Sheila is well on her way to being equally competent. This opinion of Sheila's academic competence has always been reinforced by the

feedback the Farrells have received about her from her various teachers. We got a similar report about Sheila from the school's principal who knew who she and her family were and gave us a very positive evaluation of the overall relationship. Mrs. Farrell, in conversations with us, is more negative about the school. She criticizes it for the old-fashioned sexist curriculum and a general lack of imagination. She says that it is a superior alternative to the local public school which Sheila attended for kindergarten. In spite of the availability of another parochial school which she considers better, Mrs. Farrell is going to leave Sheila in the one she is now attending because of the friends that Sheila has made there.

In summary, we can say that the Farrell's identification of their competence, of their school and of education in general is rather well in tune with the feedback which they receive from the educational institutions that they have encountered. This however has not led them to abandon their critical awareness of the limitations of what is offered them.

b) The Kinneys

The situation here is much more difficult than it is among the Farrells. Joe Kinney is attending the same parochial school Sheila Farrell attends. Like Mrs. Farrell, Mrs. Kinney is both satisfied with the school--by comparison to available public schools--and critical of some of the things which it does to Joe. In spite of her fear that she will be singled out as a "problem parent" and that this will react negatively on Joe, she has gone to speak to the teacher to complain about various matters. She has come back from these encounters only partially satisfied. Paradoxically, the main concern she expresses has to do with the fact that Joe's teacher seems to have a better opinion of him than she herself has. The teacher is of course the one who, through his grading of Joe's performance on a variety of tests, has evaluated him as being somewhat behind where he is supposed to be. But the teacher, while mentioning Joe's problem, keeps on stressing the positive and is not inclined to think that Joe is, in any way, "exceptional" (see Figure 4 for reproduction of a typical report card). Mr. Kinney, when we talked to her about Joe, assigned the "problem" to Joe being a boy and preferring "boy's things" (sports, and other such things) to "girls' things"--like education and books (which for him explained why Joe's sister is successful). Given our observations in school, we understand the teacher's essential satisfaction as being probably based on the fact that Joe is not an interactional problem in the classroom. He is quiet, pays attention, does what he is supposed to do when he is supposed to do it. On the other hand, and as we showed earlier, the interaction between Mrs. Kinney and Joe is not at all satisfactory and we can understand that her different experiences with Joe make her evaluate him differently. It is also possible that the teacher is somewhat aware of something that surfaced when Joe was tested in depth by the Teachers College Reading Center: he may not in fact be so far behind academically given that a slight change in his overall educational experiences around literacy would not cure his problem. The Reading Center summarized Joe's reading competence as follows:

> Joe is a nine-year-old fourth grader who, when asked to read orally, demonstrates good decoding skills, but little ability to understand what he is reading. On a silent reading test,

FIGURE FOUR

JOE KINNEY'S REPORT CARD (DECEMBER 1980)

CATHOLIC SCHOOLS DIOCESE OF BROOKLYN

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / PUPIL PROGRESS REPORT

SCHOLASTIC PROGRESS

	MARKING PERIODS 1	2	3
Christian Doctrine	a		
Language	B+		
Reading* / Literature	- 4		
Mathematics	B-		
Science	C-		
Social Studies	C-		
Health Education	a		

Rating Code: A—Excellent; B—Above Average; C—Average; D—Passing; F—Failing; SP—Satisfactory Progress for a pupil whose achievement is not up to grade level but who seems to be realizing his full potential.

* Reading: The grade level number indicates the pupil is reading on that grade level. The same number preceded by a minus sign (—) indicates the pupil is reading below that grade level. The same number followed by a plus sign (+) indicates the pupil is reading above that grade level.

	1	2	3
Art — Uses Materials Well			
Art — Expresses Ideas			
Literature — Enjoys Literature			
Literature — Extends Personal Tastes in Literature			
Music — Enjoys Music Class			
Music — Shows Singing and/or Playing Skills			

The Symbol "+" indicates that the pupil has shown more than average ability in the skills listed under Art, Literature and Music. No other rating code is used. It is presumed that all students have some ability in these skills even though they are not rated.

To Parents and Guardians:

The purpose of Catholic elementary education is to cooperate with the parents in the process of developing competent, mature, and thoughtful Christians. Our School will keep you informed of your child's progress in the scholastic phase of this process through this report. Since each child differs in ability, it should be examined for your child's efforts in applying his abilities. This is the best index for interpreting his scholastic achievements.

We respectfully remind you that the greater portion of the personal phase of this process takes place in the home. The report, therefore, attempts less to evaluate this phase than it does to guide you in the task of your child's formation.

Home and school have a mutual responsibility towards the child. It is our hope that this report will serve as the communications link for sharing this responsibility.

The Principal

PERSONAL PROGRESS

	MARKING PERIODS 1	2	3
EFFORTS AND STUDY HABITS:			
Expresses Himself Clearly in All Written Work	S		
Speaks Clearly and Correctly	S		
Completes Study and Written Work on Time	S		
Involves Himself in Classroom Activities	S		
PHYSICAL EDUCATION:			
Participates in Class Activities	S		
SOCIAL CHARACTERISTICS:			
Shows Respect	S		
Cooperates with Others	S		
Carries Out Responsibilities	S		
Shows Self-Control	S		

Ratings Used: S—Satisfactory N—Needs Improvement

ATTENDANCE:			
DAYS ABSENT	1		
TIMES LATE	0		

TEACHER COMMENTS — First Marking Period

Scholastic Progress: Very Good! Joe works very hard in school. Keep up the good work.

Personal Progress: Joe is a very nice boy. It's a pleasure to have him in my class.

TEACHER COMMENTS — Second Marking Period

Scholastic Progress:

Personal Progress:

TEACHER COMMENTS — Third Marking Period

Scholastic Progress:

Personal Progress:

Parents should examine this report carefully, indicate their wish concerning an interview by checking "yes" or "no" on the line, sign it and return it within three days.

PARENT'S SIGNATURE — INTERVIEW REQUESTED

Period 1 _____ YES ☐ NO ☐

Period 2 _____ YES ☐ NO ☐

Period 3 In September this pupil will be in the _____.

however, he showed that he was able to read with better comprehension and at a more rapid rate than would have been expected on the basis of his oral reading score. His vocabulary is above grade level. His spelling is phonetic and his handwriting is neat, legible and constricted. Joe seems to have done little independent silent reading for pleasure.

Since Joe possesses the skills and abilities to be an adequate reader, it would seem that he should be encouraged to read silently and independently in a variety of interesting books, magazines and newspapers. He needs to see purposes for reading and to realize that reading can be a pleasurable activity. He seems to have difficulties with listening and attention, whether it be to himself while he reads or to others when directions are given. Some work in following oral directions and developing listening and attention might be helpful for Joe. A series of books in comic book format, well written with clear print and high quality language (e.g., The Adventures of Tintin) might be suitable for Joe.

There is here, obviously, a contradiction, that Mrs. Kinney resolved, before we intervened, by deciding that, above all, Joe was altogether slow. This led her to challenge the school's evaluation and to act in terms of her own understanding. It is only after Joe's testing at Teachers College, and after we insisted that this established Joe's fundamental competence, that she came to doubt her own evaluation and put Joe on a kind of probation. Joe in fact started getting better grades in school. But this proved extremely difficult to maintain, and after we ceased intervening strongly, the old pattern seemed to re-establish itself.

D. HOMEWORK IN THE ORGANIZATION OF FAMILY LIFE

The preceding analyses of the two homework scenes may seem to have taken us very far from the more general issue of understanding how it is that families educate in such a way that some children succeed more easily than others in school. As we come back to this issue, we hope that the need to be as careful and detailed as we have been will impose itself. It would have been easy enough, for example, to blame Joe's difficulties on the disastrous homework scenes that he has to live through all the nights of his young life. It is true enough that these scenes are so organized to prevent him from learning and to associate learning with suffering. Given the rarity of any other type of strictly educational encounters in this family, it is not surprising that Joe should have difficulties. Given that Joe's sister is doing alright, we might easily blame him for being, after all, "slow." Or we might blame his mother for not being able to organize an environment where he might blossom. But we feel that none of these diagnoses of the source of the trouble would provide us with an understanding of why it is that any of these matters are in fact important. Nor could we understand how they are in fact performed, in the linear temporality of improvised everyday life. Even if Joe were dumb, he would still have to act dumb repeatedly, over many scenes, over time. Even if his dumbness is only apparent and is the "product" of his relation with his mother (or with his

teacher, or with any combination of these), this production is not a single event that happened once mechanistically in Joe's history. It is something that must still be going on as it is constantly re-produced. To the extent that this reproduction must be performed it is also constantly threatened. At any time, something can happen that will change the relationship between the participants (as indeed happened through the activity of the fieldworkers). The future is uncertain. As some psycholinguists have argued in the context of discourse processing (de Beaugrande, 1980), however strongly we may expect a particular sequence to end, however strong may the probability that we are right, the sequence may end differently from our expectations. In the context of the production of behavior we may in fact be trying very hard to ensure that these expectations will be satisfied. But we cannot be sure either since we cannot fully control our interlocutors.

From various traditions (the ethnomethodologists in the U.S., Bourdieu in France, etc.), the same kind of insight has been expressed. We feel that it is central that our overall issue be understood in terms of this insight. Joe is not simply slow. Mrs. Kinney is not simply inept at supervising homework. They are doing together, in unwitting cooperation with the school, this slowness and this ineptness. They are having a hard time. They are definitely trying to do all they can to get out of the suffering which is generated by the difficulties they have. And yet, whatever it is that they are doing seems to have the effect of reproducing the slowness and the ineptness and of justifying the ways they identify each other. All this is also true of the Farrells and their relative success. For them too, success is not a stable state; it is an "achievement" in the active sense that it is "constantly-being-achieved." At any point the organization of this process could be transformed and the apparent state changed. For Sheila to be where she should be educationally in 6th grade is no guarantee that she will still be there in 12th grade and will then move smoothly into college. The working class biographies of blue collar workers in New York City have other constraints than purely educational ones. The most we can say about Sheila's future life is that her success in 6th grade is giving her resources which MAY allow her to escape later on. Even if we could quantify the probability of such an outcome, it would remain nothing more than a probability. For the participants, in the present, this is a very real experience. Achieving the future is not a matter of coasting on one's past achievements and the probability of one's success that these achievements are associated with. It is a matter of hard work.

1. The Structuring of Creativity

We have continually insisted on this constantly-being-achieved quality of life. We wanted to restate this stance at this point carefully to frame what is following. We now need to focus on the structural principles that constrain achievement and limit the creativity which we might expect to be associated with a process in which states have to be continually reproduced in transformed environments. As we proceed in this analysis of stability-in-reproduction, we get back to what may sound at times like traditional structural-functionalism. There is much there which we consider still useful. Indeed we do not think that we can understand these families if we do not do so in a structural-functional sense that has of course been carefully rephrased to take into account the

ethnomethodological insights into the processual aspects of lived structures. Doing homework is something that one has to create from scratch every day, and then again in every sequence, subsequence and utterance. The script itself is always loose and it changes from night to night and from year to year. The performance of homework is always an improvisation. Furthermore, as we showed at length, the script allows for a certain amount of freedom so that families can imprint their own style upon it. It is clear, however, that there is a script, a theme that is imposed. However fancy the improvisations can be, it is necessary constantly to come back to this theme. The Farrells' relative scepticism about the value of homework, the games they could play around wrong answers, the long time-outs they could take out of "doing-homework," all these extreme variations always resolved back into a restatement of the theme--until of course it was decided that homework was finished.

It is on these constraints and their effects on the families' struggle that we now want to focus. The central among these constraints are, of course, those which we identified in our analysis of what it is that the families do not control when they do homework. Let us look again at those in a more processual manner. In the initial analysis, we defined the interactional structures which make a scene "homework." We also mentioned that the structural requirements could be realized in many different ways without transforming the significance of the units. This analysis, with its roots in structural linguistics, may have appeared to some essentially self-justifying. Given the extreme variations in form which homework could take, it would seem difficult to recognize an utterance as "homework" <u>if we did not already know that it was homework</u>. This is in fact a central property of what we are dealing with and needs to be recognized so that we can understand some of the more difficult consequences which interest us.

Let us look for example at alternate versions of a sequence about the time of day:

1) "What time is it?"

2a) "It ten o'clock." 2b) "It's eleven o'clock." 2c) "I don't have a watch."

3a) "You're right (wrong)!" 3b) "Time to go!" 3c) "Well, find one!"

All the dialogues that could be produced by combining the varied statements would make some sense as long as we consider them in abstraction from any situation in which they may be uttered <u>and</u> as long as we imagine a situation in which they would make sense. In other words, we can combine the above utterances at will because no interactional context has been provided <u>and</u> because, out of our cultural common sense, we can provide various contexts in which they would make sense (actual accounts are offered by Mehan [1979b] and others). Thus:

-A 1)---2a) or 2b)---3b)

and

-B 1)---2c)---3c)

make sense if we assume that they are part of a dialogue about leaving a particular place at a certain time. Conversely

-C 1)---2a) or 2b)---3a)

only make sense if we assume that the purpose of the initial question is to test the knowledge of the addressee. It would be more difficult to imagine contexts for the other possible sequences though it might be possible.* But what is important here is that all the sequences share much of their form. They all, for example, start with the same apparent REQUEST FOR INFORMATION. Sequences A and C also share their second stage. It is only as a whole that they fully differentiate themselves.

This exercise, however, is artificial. In real life the contexts are always-already-there. They are pre-defined by cues that are either being performed concurrently with the verbal utterances, but on a different medium, or have been previously performed with a clear marking to the effect that the context established is valid for all further utterances until notice is given that the scene is ended. Thus, in a scene marked "homework" either because the original question is printed in a workbook, or because it was uttered within marked boundaries, any utterance, or sequence, will be interpreted as homework, whether it is complete or not, whether it takes the canonical form or not. Thus utterance 1), by itself, can "already-be" homework if the context has been appropriately marked. There may be no immediate answer (because of a time-out, an interruption, the ignorance of the addressee, etc.). Conversely, we can imagine homework scenes in which sequence A would be produced, though we might also expect that in such a case, utterance 3b) would be marked as a joke which would lead to a reinstatement of the canonical sequence. It might also be that the sequence might become a closing sequence; the "time to go" might also be "the time to finish doing homework." All this may appear confusing in such an ungrounded account as this one but would never be in real life dialogues. There we always operate in terms of what Grice has called a "principle of cooperation." This principle could also be understood as the principle of "Assumed Coherence" which could be stated as: "all statements (including silence) are to be assumed to make sense in terms of some context (within a set of contexts) which either has been predefined or is introduced by the statement itself."

Homework, then, while it is continually being produced, is also an overarching structure which transforms anything that happens within its purported boundaries <u>into</u> homework, however extreme the actual production may be in comparison to the canonical form. Homework is not so much characterized by what actually happens within it as by what differentiates it from the other activities which a family may enter into either before, after, or in parallel with it. It is only if we understand this character of homework as a scene

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*The sequence 1---2c)---3b) may make sense a) as part of a joke about inmates in an insane asylum, b) as a clowning routine, c) as an event in everyday life if we assume that some unspoken reframing information was exchanged between utterances 2 and 3.

which is controlled down to the briefest utterances by an external set of features which establish a coherence system for the interpretation of these utterances, that we can understand the kinds of dilemmas that confront our families. (This argument is well stated by D.L. Wieder [1974] and to some extent by Dore and McDermott [1982]).

2. The coherence of failure

Our analysis of the external features of homework scenes which families do not control can be summarized in a statement to the effect that "homework is a scene in which the knowledge a particular individual has of a particular topic is evaluated by someone else." Evaluation is a central aspect of homework. Evaluation is, obviously, the focused determination of the presence or absence of a piece of knowledge. In other words, failure is a central possibility within evaluation. It is enough to remember that, in the canonical sequence /AQE/ the /E/ stands for either [Right] or [Wrong]. In fact, it is the probability of [Wrong] as a realization of /E/ that is considered to make tests necessary. Failure is the central condition of evaluation. If failure was not possible, there would be no need for evaluation. And vice versa. To produce a statement that leads to another one to the effect that the first one was "wrong" is eminently coherent. Only exceptional persons are expected to "get it right" all the time. It is normal to get it wrong. In this sense failure is not an interactional "problem." It is part of the normal, possible, progression of the scene. Finally, evaluation implies a someone else who controls it. And it implies an institutional framework within which it makes sense for more people to evaluate others on narrowly specified criteria.

But failure is, also, a massive problem. It is, for all concerned, a-normal-event-that-should-not-occur. All concerned know that failure will have massive consequences both in social and personal terms. It is in the great interest of the individuals directly concerned not to fail. To fail is to prove oneself dumb. It is to ensure a life history at the lowest rungs of the society. It is not surprising that individuals and their families should struggle mightily not to fail and suffer when they do. We saw how the Kinneys struggled. The problem for us now is to understand how it is that the Kinneys, in spite of these constant struggles, and in spite of the fact that it would seem that they control much of what is going on within their own homework scenes, continue to produce something that is painful for all those involved.

The Kinneys it will be remembered receive feedback around homework from two sources. First, they suffer while doing the homework. Second, they suffer when they find out what is the school's official evaluation of this homework: Joe is remaining below grade level. We could imagine that this should be enough to signal to them that they are doing something wrong and that they should change their operating procedures. There is some evidence that Mrs. Kinney is aware that something must change. She does not like what her mother is doing with Joe. She is continually involved in "improving" the procedural aspects of doing homework (getting the right pencil, writing legibly, paying attention, working on a clean table, etc.). And yet, this awareness is counter-productive. For months, indeed years as far as we can tell, the same solutions to the same problems have tended to leave Joe stuck at the same relative place with the accompanying suffering. In fact we

believe that the "solutions" are part of the problem. They reinforce Joe's situation rather than change it. This suggests that something more powerful than Mrs. Kinney's efforts is operative.

There is first the fact that failure is coherent. It is doubly coherent for the Kinneys given Mrs. Kinney's self-evaluation as "one who failed in school." That Joe should fail is a cause for suffering, but it is not surprising. Something more subtle and yet more radical is also at work here: the feedback that Mrs. Kinney receives is so organized to lead her to reproduce the very conditions that produced the failure rather than to criticize radically these conditions. Let us look at how this works.

Besides making failure interactionally coherent, homework also has the property of focusing this failure on the individual actors, the child first, and the supervising parent, second. If something is going wrong, it is the child that is to be blamed. Homework is also structured to blame the parent, and even, to a certain extent, the teacher. This has the effect of deflecting the blame from the institution itself. However violent may be the effect of having to do homework on the people who have to do it, only a radical shift in consciousness can lead one to criticize the organization of the overall externally-controlled structure of the scene. Thus, the Kinneys' experience of homework as a painful event in their life does not lead to a critique of homework as such. It leads to a critique of <u>their own</u> way of doing homework. All the changes that they may consider have the effect of leading them to do more of what makes them suffer. Joe would like homework simply to go away--which would of course lead to a more radical type of failure (expulsion from his parochial school and placement in the remedial classes of a public school). Mrs. Kinney has focused on procedural matters: salvation, for her, is the more exact performance of those acts which will make homework look more like homework--something which she cannot do given other pressures on her life that "interrupts" and which, in any event, is counterproductive given the time that attention to procedure takes away from the performance of the actual educational tasks.

Given the spotlighting power of homework, we can understand that people should be blinded into seeing only themselves. We, as analysts, should not be so blinded and must look at the spotlight itself, at the mechanisms that focus it, at the people who aim it and at the functions which it serves. When we do this we immediately loose sight of the individuals who seemed so important earlier. For some famous critics of structural functionalism, this is cause for a strong admonition to come back from behind the spotlight. For us, the disappearance of the individual as actual person rather than as cypher is a property of the system. The school (though not necessarily Joe's teachers)* is not designed to care about specific individuals except as a cipher to which scores must be attached. However much educators may balk at being put in the situation of evaluators, this is the one to which they have been assigned and

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*Our other work on schools suggests that teachers and administrators are suffering just as much as parents are because they are caught in the same system (Varenne & Kelly, 1976; McDermott & Aron, 1978).

from which they can as little escape as the Kinneys and Farrells can.

The above suggests that Joe's and Mrs. Kinney's failure is itself irrelevant. Should they suddenly become successful, nothing would change within the system. There would simply be a minor recalibration of someone else's official evaluation: that person would now fail. Furthermore, the irrelevance of failure as an event structurally tied to particular persons (rather than to some persons in general) also suggests that the "dumbness" which evaluation somehow uncovers is itself not the total personal event which it is made to be. School evaluated dumbness is only relevant to school controlled tasks.

If we stand outside of the school, suddenly, dumbness ceases to be a relevant category. As the need to evaluate disappears, so does the interactional coherence of the evaluation. Outside of homework, and schooling in general, Joe Kinney is not dumb. Neither is Mrs. Kinney. They are thoroughly normal people reacting sensitively and sensibly to the conditions in which they find themselves. They are in fact extremely competent at the cultural performance of homework: they know what to do, they know the implications and consequences. They know when to suffer. Neither of them interacts in such a way that we cannot imagine that, given different circumstances, they might not reach an altogether different life. But their interactional competence is precisely not the issue that homework evaluates. It is irrelevant to their school success.

For us, all this is generalizable to all failure, or success in school. No improvement within the structure of homework can possibly make any difference about the fact that some will fail and many will suffer. However much a family can transform its way of doing homework so that the child will be consistently successful in school, this does not make the possibility of failure any less likely. These are absolute limits.

CHAPTER SIX

THE JOINT ACHIEVEMENT OF STRUCTURED DIFFERENTIATION IN UNCERTAINTY: SOME BACKGROUND THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

"If you kick a stone, it moves with the energy which it got from your kick. If you kick a dog, it moves with the energy which it got from its own metabolism" Bateson, G. (1972:481-2).

The mandate that we, as educational researchers, were given concerns individuals and an environment, their family, that we all have many reasons to believe to be very powerful. This is true whether this mandate is stated in the strict vocabulary suggested by NIE, whether it is stated in Rosemary Benet's poetic language, even indeed if it is stated by a twelve-year-old Black girl who was not even doing well in school. When she described her relationship with her nephew with the statement we use as our title: "I teach him everything he learns in school," she told us in effect that the nephew is a single, separate person who is learning. She told us that somebody else, a kin, helped and in fact "taught everything" that the school taught. We, of course, know that this is not to be taken quite literally. But it is a demonstration of the depth of a mandate that is more than an academic exercise. How families help educate their (single) children is not only an issue for research. It is also a fundamental concern for all Americans.

In this concluding statement, we would like to focus more deliberately on this concern as our theoretical understanding of our observations can shed light on it. The concern has to do with the apparent presence of statistical correlations between a child's home environment and his or her school performance, particularly with regard to literacy matters. Such a probabilistic linkage was made all the more interesting by the appearance that a family's own organization around school-like literacy tasks was itself linked to its position within the broad organization of the society as a whole. Such arguments have been made in various ways for at least thirty years by two generations of sociologists of education. All large scale surveys confirm the existence of such correlations. The children of all classes do not all succeed at the same rate and, within any class, it is possible to explain some of the variation in performance by reference to various family features. What has happened in recent years is that more and more analysts have realized that such findings are more in the order of a further specification of a problem than in the order of a solution to such a problem. Unless one adopts a totally mechanistic view of human social life, one must continue to wonder about the processes which lead to the recreation or reproduction of prevailing conditions by apparently separated individual organisms acting out in uncertain futures improvised performances without scripts and often in fierce struggles with each other.

It is easier to criticize failures to confront this paradox directly than it is to demonstrate that this is not a paradox at all and that sociological processes can be described that show promise of accounting for the actual construction and maintenance of social systems. We suspect that most the classical authors of the past who are now often blamed for suggesting static and mechanistic sociologies have in fact strong intuitions into the problem that continues to concern us. Marx certainly, but also Durkheim or Parsons, for example, all initially wanted to deal with the sociological production of order through individual action. That they all failed in various ways should be considered a warning. Unless constant care is taken, there is something in the writing of sociological theory which seems ineluctably to lead authors, if not in their own understanding of their work, at least in the reading that it is

allowable to make of this work, to fall back either into a static, mechanistic account of social patterns, or -- equally unhelpful -- into individualistic subjectivity which threatens the ability to handle order of any kind other than personal. It is in full awareness of these difficulties that we offer the following statement which, we hope, will help to clear a path -- if only for a little way.

The general question, translated to our data, is the following:

- What is the relationship between Mrs. Farrell's political involvement, Mr. Farrells's acceptance of this involvement, his truck driving, the way they conduct Sheila's homework, and Sheila's relative success in school?

Our answer, at its starkest, is the following:

- It is a matter of historical happenstance.

By itself, such an answer is misleading. In the context of what has preceded it and follows it, we hope it will have the effect of radically separating our analysis from any that would offer as a sufficient answer the assignment a probabilistic value to the various items of behavior which the question artificially separates. As far as we are concerned, these items (Mrs. Farrell's political activity, Mr. Farrell's truck driving, etc.) are not separatable. As we have shown they are intimately part of each other. Thus there is no way that we can assume that any, or any combinations of them, could be considered the "cause" of any of the other. What is to be explained is their joint appearance in a family and the question must be understood as concerning a search for the conditions that make this joint appearance possible. It could be restated as follows:

- How come the Farrells display the set of behaviors reported?

The answer could then be restated as follows:

- It is their way of performing what they are required to do with the resources that are given to them.

Sheila's competence must also be treated in the same fashion. As we have tried to show, this competence is a complex, highly differentiated matter that concerns not only her ability to read in an abstract way, but her ability to use this ability at the right times and in coherent fashions. It concerns her ability to deal with such seemingly contradictory messages as "this answer to this homework question is wrong," but "you are fundamentally O.K." Sheila's competence, thus, is also a "set of behaviors," and it, too, must be investigated as a response performed with externally provided resources.

Our issue thus involves the sub-issues of randomness and control. It could be restated, once again, as consisting of answers to the questions:

- On what grounds can we say that any behavior, or sequence of behaviors is not random but is rather a part of larger sequences which control it?

- On what grounds can we say that any behavior controls any other?

- What are the conditions that allow us to answer the preceding questions?

This should make it clear that we assume, at the same time, that any behavior is random to a degree and that it is controlled by other behaviors. The dog who ran away under his own steam after Bateson kicked him did something that made sense in relation to the kick. It was coherent with it. But the dog did it in a direction, for a length of time and in an exact fashion that Bateson did not control and could not quite predict. Bateson's uncertainty is thus as much part of the interactional process as the fact that the dog would respond to the kick. And so Mrs. Farrell's uncertainty about Sheila's future. Even though we may have good grounds to assign a probability to various possible futures, we too must take the stance that this future is uncertain, that the past "just happened" and that Sheila has always moved and will always move "with the energy which she gets from her own metabolism."

In the next pages, we discuss these issues from several points of view. We first relate our views about re-randomization to Bateson's discussion of ambiguity (1971: 5-7). This is followed by a summary of notions about cybernetic control which we believe are helpful towards an understanding of the processes we are looking at. We then consider the matter of family structure which is central to our analysis of the Farrells as a special kind of family. We try to sort out the extent to which, on the one hand, the Farrells can be dealt with as a differentiated unit within larger sequences of units, i.e., as a FAMILY of a general type that is controlled in its form by the larger society and, on the other hand, the extent to which they can be considered a family of a particular type that is somewhat unique within its type. Finally we conclude with comments about the conditions that may allow us to talk about transfer of competences as a person moves from participation in one kind of structure to participation in another.

A. BEYOND AMBIGUITY AND RANDOMNESS

Bateson's analysis of the disambiguation of messages is interesting to us because it closely parallels our own analysis of non-randomness in social behavior. As Bateson puts it, human beings can discriminate between phonemes, they can discriminate between syllables and then words, etc., up the linguistic levels of organizational complexity, but these discriminations become communicationally significant only when they are placed within units of the next higher order. Communicational significance refers to the power of a statement to have an effect on an interactional sequence by providing enough information for a response to be produced that is explicitly linked to some features of the initial signal. Thus, silence, a simple nasalization, a single phoneme, or even a single syllable do not provide an audience with any other clue than the vague probability that there may be some communicational act being performed that may require an answer. But the ambiguity is immense and a very large set of responses can be offered that are in some way coherent. It is only as larger sequences are produced by placing silences within the context of periods of talk, by placing "mm's" at appropriate junctures, by placing phonemes within syllables, syllables within words and words within sentences that ambiguity is

lessened, that the field within which an answer can be said to be coherent is limited and that an interaction that has a practical effect can finally be performed.

Bateson's discussion was intended as an introduction to an analysis of a short section of talk (a therapeutic interview). Bateson was trying to sort out issues traditionally associated with the concepts of "interpretation" and "meaning" without falling in the mentalistic traps that surround these concepts. Our discussion is intended to frame an analysis of much longer sequences of human behavior. We begin where Bateson left off, with the analysis of short sections of a brief scene and moving on to the constitution of biographies, familial structures, school structures and even broader institutional structures. Much of what Bateson had to say thus does not apply literally. The issue of ambiguity that was central to Bateson is not so central to us as stated. The probability that Mrs. Farrell will perform certain behaviors in certain settings is not, strictly speaking, a question about the "meaning" of her behaviors. It is rather a question about the practical significance of the behaviors. What is achieved is not a meaningful utterance. It is, rather, a practical action coherent with its conditions and its goals that will be followed by other practical actions. Our issue is one of de-randomization.

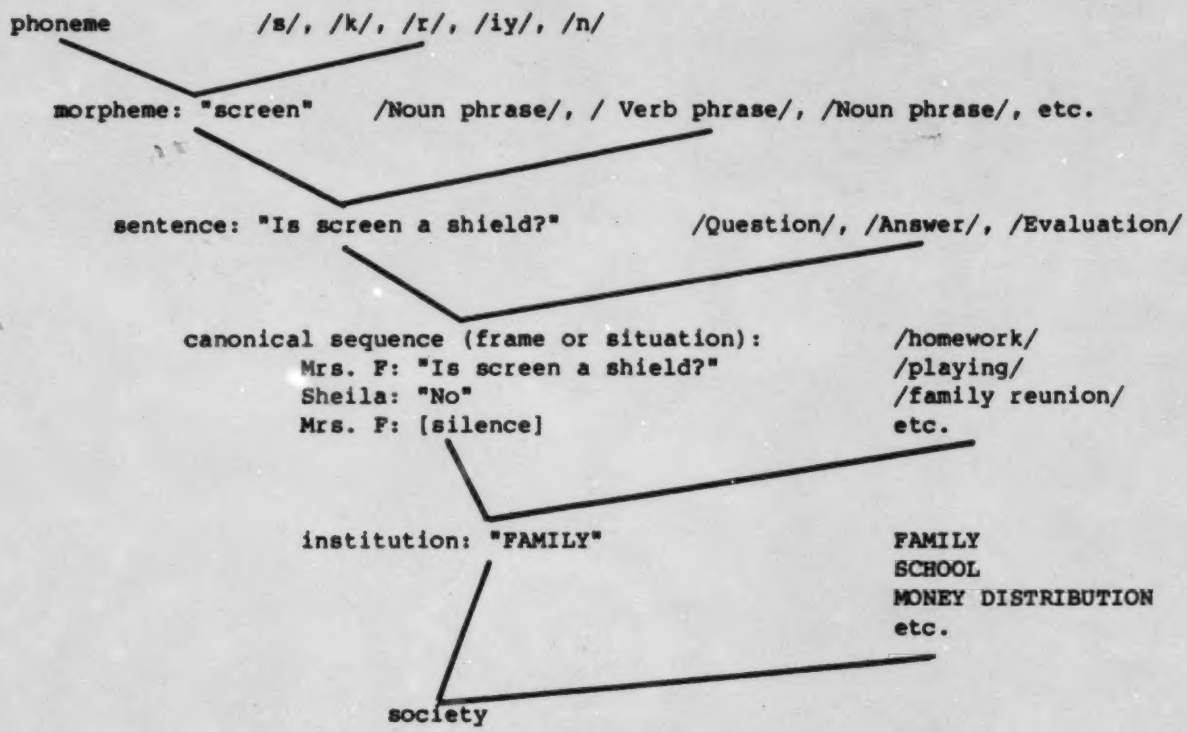
This issue itself, however, is to be treated in the same manner as Bateson deals with disambiguation. First, and more fundamental, is the need to shift to units of the level initially under consideration. Thus phonemes are disambiguated when they become words, words when they become sentences, sentences when they become texts or conversations. Texts and conversations are de-randomized when they become a frame or situation. Situations are de-randomized when they become an institution, and institutions when they become a society (see Figure 5 for a representation of this theoretical world). Second is the need to deal with larger and larger units within the communicational stream. This obviously is a correlate of the need to shift to higher levels. The higher the level, the more units it integrates into the new structure, and the more time it will take to become aware of even a few occurrences of the units of the higher level. To the summary of these principles of disambiguation, Bateson adds the cautionary note that the most one can do, even after one has considered large bodies of data, is that one has increased the probability of a given interpretation: "the approach to non-ambiguity will be asymptotic" (1971: 7). The same principles, and the same caveat, apply to the issue of de-randomization. One can only see the practical significance of an act if it is placed within the wider sequence within which it is but a step. This sequence is necessarily a unit of the next higher hierarchical level. It is necessarily a longer temporal event than the original behavior. It probably involves the participation of more people. It thus requires that a different kind of methodology be used for it to be investigated. And, finally, while extensive investigation can delimit the probable function of an act to a very high degree, there is always the possibility that something new will be found to have been done through it, or will indeed be done in some future.

The discussion that closed our analysis of the homework scene may help make the above more concrete. At that point, we mentioned that fully coherent sequences at the level of the propositional content of the constitutive utterances could be shown to be ambiguous at the level of their placement in broader

FIGURE 5

REPRESENTATION OF THEORETICAL MODEL USED IN ANALYSIS

(The diagram includes for each level of ordering a label more or less traditionally used to refer to the level and an example based on an exchange in the Farrell homework scene, Fa-60 and 61.)



morpheme:	organized, differentiated set of phonemes
sentence:	organized, differentiated set of morphemes
sequence:	organized, differentiated set of sentences
institutions:	organized, differentiated set of sequences
society:	organized, differentiated set of institutions

(It must be noted that, at any level, the concepts refer to structures which are creatively performed by people, with which people have to deal, which make their statements and actions meaningful and coherent. But they do not refer to people. A sentence, obviously, is not a person. Neither is a society a group of persons. It is something which persons create and use. It is something which they perform.)

sequences of social interaction. A question sequence about the time of day can be either an actual request for the time or it can be "homework." We mentioned that the disambiguation could be operated through two different processes. We could either search for clues as to the overall identificaton of the scene, or we could try to find out what happened when we substituted certain segments within the actual progression of the scene. Thus the canonical form of homework scenes makes acceptable a this is /Right/ or this is /Wrong/ response to information about what the time is. The canonical form of request for time from strangers in the street does not allow for such a response. "Thank you!" is the appropriate response.*

To talk of "disambiguation" here, however, can be misleading. It is not only that the participants in the scene all knew very well what they were doing and when they were doing it. We saw how masterful they were in maintaining various frames at the same time without losing their ability to complete sequences appropriately. What is important here is that the Farrells and the Kinneys were doing something and what they were doing was not a random creation but rather something that had an overdetermined place within a broader system at the next hierarchical level. It would be metaphorical to say that, when doing homework, these families are doing something that is "meaningful" and un-ambiguous insofar as the teachers will respond to it as homework. While total homework scenes (including the teacher's input and their response) are performed in a situation where talk predominates, the actual structure of the discourse that is produced is not organized through the apparent exchanges of meaning. It is organized by the practical task that is to be produced. In other words, a homework scene is not a therapeutic interview in which the total frame is so organized as to make it appear that the progression of the scene is totally dependent on the sequencing of verbal utterances that are to be "interpreted." A homework scene must be handled as a scene that is a constituent of a higher level structure. Homework is not simply something that a family happens to be doing--randomly. It is something that constitutes our societies--in the same manner as the phoneme /p/ constitutes "pat."

B. CYBERNETIC CONTROL

Randomness in human behavior is clearly a limit phenomenon. Randomness never occurs. It is only an aspect of what human beings have to deal with as they conduct their lives. If Bateson is right, it is an aspect of all behavior by biological entities all the way down to the amoebae. No live organism can act on another live organism except in terms of this energy got from its metabolism that made Bateson's dog run away. All responses will appear somewhat random to any original behavior. The original actor can thus only rely on probabilities. From his point of view, it is uncertainty that must be considered

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*By "appropriate" we mean that the response constitutes the structural baseline in contrast to which all alternative forms that responses can take will themselves be responded to. By "appropriate" or "canonical" form, we do not mean that this is the form that most such segments within relevant interactions will take.

the basis of whatever planning an actor can make as he does something that is supposed to have an effect. It is obvious that the presence of this individual energy which makes responses uncertain does not prevent joint action from being performed in extremely practical fashions. In fact, it is probable that the uncertainty is both responsible for the creativity of life and for the ability to build higher level, more complex systems.

The de-randomization of behavior in real interactional time is operated through what is widely known as "feedback." In joint action--and all human action is, eventually, joint--there always are mechanisms that allow for the original actor to signal to the addressee the extent to which his response is coherent. In fact, it is the practical presence of such mechanisms that make joint action possible. Without feedback from interlocutors, a speaker or actor will soon be by himself, isolated in an interactional desert, and the task will not get accomplished. As the interaction proceeds in real time, it is obvious that all interlocutors will sequentially find themselves in the position of addresser monitoring the response of the addressee for coherence in terms of what it was expected should be answered, and then in the position of addressee seeking to deliver a coherent response in the face of great uncertainty as to which response will in fact be coherent. Furthermore, an addressee's response is necessarily itself a next step within the interaction. It is thus normal for it to go beyond strict responsive coherence and to become a new beginning that builds over what has already been accomplished of the overall task. Any statement thus can be shown to reflect what must have happened before and what is likely to happen next. And thus, uncertain step after uncertain step, a task is accomplished.

The above insistence on randomness, uncertainty, reflexivity, situational specificity and the uniqueness of action has sometimes been interpreted by some as a license to criticize radically the possibility of talking about any kinds of social orders in human action. What some have forgotten is that notions of feedback and reflexivity were originally developed as ways to deal more strictly with "systems," i.e., with highly organized sequences of events. Constant creation of new behaviors specifically designed to fit within the actual historical development of a particular sequence is a condition of human systems and structures. It is not the denial of their relevance. Strictly speaking, the issue here is not relevant to freedom and creativity but rather to control and conservation. This is why, following Bourdieu, we have talked repeatedly of "reproduction." Sheila or Mrs. Farrell may have continually to create new behaviors in uncertainty. And yet they control each other. They are in turn controlled by the conditions of and responses to their behaviors which come from outside their family so that as a whole they end up producing something that is equivalent in its further impact as what an extreme large number of persons and families, in New York City and across the United States, themselves produce as they too struggle in uncertainty.

One of the first papers in cybernetics stated that "the behavior of an object is controlled by the margin of error at which the object stands at a given time with reference to a relatively specific goal" (Rosenblueth, Wiener and Bigelow, 1968 [1943]: 222). This statement was made in relation to a discussion of the communicational processes which allow a target-seeking torpedo to achieve its task. In relation to a torpedo, it makes sense to talk about

"error" and to consider that the target is a passive object. In relation to human beings we think it is more appropriate to talk about "uncertainty," particularly since we have to deal both with the relationship of the actual behavior performed in relation to the task and with the relationship of this behavior to what has already been accomplished. Furthermore given the non-passivity of the target, it is always possible that its response will transform what started as an apparent error into the dominant "right" feature of the recast task. To speak of "error" implies an ability to speak of "rightness." This is exactly what the principle of uncertainty cannot allow us to do.

There are two aspects to the non-passivity point. First, it is obvious that, in normal interaction, the "target" (addressor) of an action is never passive in relation to behaviors that concern it. Depending, the addressor can either start evasive action, or it can cooperate by actively participating in the "correction" of the errors. Most human tasks are in fact performed cooperatively. We can assume that the task that is the goal is the task of all the participants and that they will help each other by preparing themselves for an act addressed to them that is still to be performed some time in the future. In this manner people can suggest that certain things be done to them to which they can then respond. That this indeed happens has been demonstrated repeatedly (Birdwhistell, 1970; Byers, 1976). Secondly, there is the fact that any human joint action is always a single behavior within a larger sequence so that, as a whole, it is controlled by condition-setting and responses of the other groups who singly act jointly with them. The major correlate of this is that any joint action which by itself can be looked at a joint creation controlling of individual acts within itself but relatively indeterminate as to the exact organization of the participants is in fact itself controlled. As Durkheim understood a long time ago, the historical differentiation of joint actions (the "division of labors") is itself controlled by the overall tasks to be accomplished by the whole.

This brings us back to our earlier discussion of disambiguation. Any behavior, any joint action, looked in itself, will appear historically specific, creative and relatively free or random. Any behavior when looked at in the context of other behaviors to which it is response and condition will appear overly determined the more it is placed within the performances of actions at higher and higher hierarchical levels. This can lead us back to the general statement of our approach to social action which we made earlier in the introduction and used throughout this work: social action is the joint achievement of structured differentiation in uncertainty. In this statement,

- "joint" refers to the interactional, cooperative base of action;
- "achievement" refers to the fact that all actions have to be practically performed in real time;
- "structured" refers to the fact that all actions are part of higher level systems that are themselves cybernetically controlled;
- "differentiation" refers to the fact that while the various participants to one action all perform this one thing, they do not all practically do the same things;

- "uncertainty" refers to cybernetic control.

C. SECONDARY SPECIFICATION OF SUBSYSTEMS

When talking about the structuring of behavior, we have until now only mentioned the behavioral consequences of the interplay between, on the one hand, uncertainty and danger of entropic randomness, and, on the other hand, controlling conditions and feedback. We have emphasized the extent to which what appears like random occurrences can always be understood as controlled performances after a level shift. We have not specifically discussed the fact that, given the complexity of even the lower levels, the randomization of the behavior of any unit at these levels caused by the uncertainty of their interaction with units of the same order at the next level can become relatively systematized in its randomness with respect to the requirements of the functioning of this other level. In more concrete terms: while all behaviors of a family in relation to other families or institutions like the school can be understood in terms of the requirements of the joint tasks which schools and families perform in our society, the feedback the school gives to families is uncertain enough for the families to persist in doing things that are not what the school may require. In other words, an "error," a divergent behavior, may become systematized, constantly reproduced and, in some ways "typical" of the behavior of the family. Thus, we saw how the Farrells could elaborate on the school requirements about homework by insisting that Sheila state the grounds on which she found the right answers to her mother's homework questions.

The literature on which we have relied to arrive at the understanding which we presented earlier has little to say about this. In general, in spite of the general recognition that lower levels must be understood in terms of higher ones, ethnographic accounts generally end up treating the higher level considered as the ultimate one. Thus most studies of family structures do not systematically draw the consequences from the fact that families are themselves part of societies. Studies of larger social structures do not always look at the specific structure under study as the historical achievement in uncertainty which it also is. In this analytic process, the various sources of structuration for the level under consideration are confused. In particular, it becomes very difficult to sort out the extent to which an analyzed structural constraint is to be understood as a product of the unit's relation to other units in a wider system or whether it is to be understood as somehow developed by the unit itself as an elaboration over the uncertainty of the feedback which it receives. Only anthropologists can be said to have systematically tried to deal for what is known as "cultural variation" and, even here, the interactional processes which make such variation possible are not always well understood.

It is particularly important that we discuss the issue here since we make rather strong statements about the Farrells or the Kinneys as integrated, differentiated units. The danger here, as we mentioned repeatedly during the analysis, is that this unity be understood in an "oversocialized" manner. The regulation of the Farrells, so that they can be seen as one structure doing certain things in common in relation to what other units are doing to them is a complex, and relatively fragile, accomplishment of a certain kind. Furthermore, it must be

emphasized that the shift from a consideration of what Mrs. Farrell does during the homework scene to a consideration of what the four partners are doing in their familial life is a shift in level. What we say about one level is not directly relevant to what we say about the next. To use the convenient linguistic analogy, the traditional phonemic analysis of "pat" as being made up of three phonemes /p/, /ae/, /t/, emphasizes that the three can be specified without reference to the environments in which they are found. Conversely the word itself, as a semantic unit, has a value that is incommensurate to the semantic value of the constituent phonemes. Similarly, when analyzing the Farrells, we can specify the specific constitution of each member of the family. But this specification is irrelevant to the functioning of the higher unit in those contexts in which it is this unit as such that is significant. In the context of "education," for example, it is certain that "the school" is dependent for its own organization on "families." The children must have a place to go to "after" school. But the school is not dependent upon the individual Farrells. That Mrs. Farrell should be an activist, that her husband should be a truck driver who is made educationally questionable by the other members of the family, all this is irrelevant to the school. Conversely, the actual personality of Sheila's teacher and, even more so, the type of relationships that she may have with other teachers or the principal, are of no concern to the Farrells, as long as, as a whole, they have a school for Sheila to attend. The analytic question then becomes one of accounting for the mode of relationships between such institutions in an analogous fashion to the manner a linguist may describe syntactic relationships without worrying about phonemic ones.

We briefly dealt with such relational structures in our discussion of the broadest of constraints over the Farrells' literacy. It was clear to us that what could appear as a personal literacy developed somewhat randomly by the operation of processes internal to either them individually or even them as a particular type of family, was to be understood as the much less random product of the quality of the relationships between institutions characteristic of our society as a whole. Our ethnography was not however intended to provide a full account of such relationships. It was rather intended to investigate the way in which the impact of such relationships is not quite what we might expect. The Farrells, as a unit, have not choice but to relate with the institutions around them in ways that are made coherent to these institutions either because of their own direct action or simply because of the feedback that is offered to their actions by the institutions. But, when we shift downward one level, we come to realize that the constraints from the higher level that are necessarily dealt with are not fully determinant of the internal organization of the family. We saw this initially when we saw how varied our sample of working class families turned out to be. We now see this as a necessary aspect of the hierarchical organization of human interaction.

This still leaves us with the issue of the structuring of the Farrells as a particular kind of family. To reiterate, what de-randomized the performance of homework is the fact that it is a part of a broader sequence significant at a level in which, quite literally, FAMILIES relate to SCHOOLS. What de-randomized the performance of the extra sequence of meta-questioning among the Farrells is the fact that it can be shown to be one instance of a style of relating among them that is more characteristic of them as a special kind of organism than it is of each of them. What renders this argument apparently difficult to make is

the fact that each Farrell behaves in very different ways. The temptation then is to approach this behavior as if it were the simple product of internal differences. Without denying such differences, we want the analysis to focus on the fact that the actual performance of these differences is dependent upon a general agreement. We want to stress also that the very organization of the Farrells leads them to act out in specific ways that only make sense in terms of the relations that they have among each other. The most striking illustration of this was the matter of Mr. Farrell's apparent incompetence. Within the family he justified his partner's opinions by not asserting his competence. He had been a rather good student until the last years of high school and we sometimes had the feeling that he might still have been more competent than his position let him show. We suspected also that Joe Kinney's sanctioned incompetence was also a joint creation. Here again, however, the issue is not so much that Mr. Farrell, or Joe, are or are made to be incompetent. It is rather that they are made to relate with their partners on the basis of assumed incompetence so that even an example of competence will be treated in terms of a canonical situation of incompetence. The "empty chair" sequence which we analyzed at some length makes the point very well: after it became evident that Joe had performed something that was in fact extremely competent, Mrs. Kinney abundantly exclaims about how nice he has just been, thereby underlying that this competence is something extra-ordinary. Incompetence here is totally interactional; it is only relevant (i.e., non-random in terms of the pattern of the interaction) to the pattern of this interaction. We cannot assume that this means that Joe will also be incompetent in school, when he is placed within different relational structures.

We come back presently to the issue of transfer. Before we do, we feel it is necessary briefly to discuss the processes that give rise to the specification of relational styles within families (and by extension, of course, to any within small human groups that spend significant amounts of time together performing differentiated tasks--e.g., classrooms, offices, gangs, etc.). To do this, we must refer again to the fact that the canonical form of any interaction is never anything more than the form in terms of which specific acts defined as relevant to it are evaluated as being in fact relevant. It represents the teleological pattern that organizes the feedback inputs which partners in an interaction give each other as they seek to perform a certain action. We must stress again that the actual performance of the action is an uncertain accomplishment so that any one behavior is somehow "wrong" and in need of some feedback to bring it back where it is supposed to go. This means that any performance of a patterned sequence will always be somehow unique and could never be repeated in its details. From the point of view of the whole action, however, such variations in performance are irrelevant as long as something has happened that has accomplished it. It is this uncertainty and insignificance of certain kinds of variation that can be exploited to create specific ways of accomplishing the overall action. In other words, through various learning processes, it is possible to overlay a structure, or a canonical sequence, with another structure that fulfills all the requirements of the higher one but adds a new level of determination. This new structure is itself nothing more than a teleological pattern. The Farrells must still act out their own patterns in uncertainty. But neither can they act except in terms of this pattern.

This does not mean, of course, that this pattern does not have a history

and cannot change. Had we been able to conduct a more thorough investigation of this history, we might have been able to see how it evolved. It is certain that the Farrells have not always exhibited the homeostatic satisfaction that we saw them in during our fieldwork. There was a long stormy period in their relationship when it would have appeared pathological and on the point of rupture. It is certain that it will change in the future as the children grow up, new ones get born, Mrs. Farrell continues school, or even more unpredictable events take place. The Farrells are too small a group to provide very powerful feedback to the members. The very fact that the creative uniqueness of their pattern is the product of a blind spot within the requirements of higher levels suggest that the feedback that the Farrells receive from the outside can only be disruptive to their organization. It allows them to have an organization, but it does not support any specific one--at the level that interests us, of course.

D. THE ISSUE OF COMPETENCE TRANSFERS

With the preceding considerations on the structuring of family life, we are better equipped to deal with the fundamental issue which triggered this research: "in what ways can we say that a child's experience within his or her family so shape personal competence that this child will perform better on school tests than other children from different backgrounds?" Or, "in what ways can we say that a coherent performance in certain settings, with certain people and for certain goals, leads to another kind of coherent performance, in other settings, with other people and for other goals--the kind of performance that the school formally and symbolically sanctions as 'competent'?"

It should go without saying, by now, that we do not think that this transfer is a simple matter of course. It is easy enough to argue that Sheila is privileged over Joe on at least two counts: the feedback that Sheila receives from her parents is consistent with a fundamental evaluation of Sheila as "competent." Joe receives the opposite kind of feedback. It is also evident that the extra-elaboration over the imposed homework scene which the Farrells have developed is homologous in form to the most fundamental structures of school teaching (Mehan, 1979). One could argue that Sheila is thus prepared by her family to what will happen to her in school and that she is not surprised or submitted to any kind of culture shock. This may explain the edge which she may have had over some of her classmates. This edge could then be transformed into the type of position within the classroom that would make her be noticed by the teacher as "a good student" and then be placed in such a position within the class structure that she would easily continue to appear competent.

It is certain that some of the above must have been going on and that it continued to be operative. We do not have the data to make any definitive statement about the exact process of Sheila's adaptation in school. But we know enough about classroom structure to know that a class, like a family, is a complex social event in which differentiated roles are performed according to principles that have little to do with personal competence. Such competence, of course, is the dominant symbolic structure that organizes the discourse and ritualization of the classroom. But the accent on competence is, in school as we saw it be among the Farrells and the Kinneys, a joint social achievement. In other words, Sheila can only be seen as competent in school to the extent that

her teacher and fellow students conspire in making her appear competent. Furthermore, in a school setting where competence is specifically understood as a finely gradated event with various children being placed at various places within the ranking system. In this sense differential performance on tests validates the need for testing and grades which validates back the evaluation of a child and the biographical fate that is then assigned him. Sheila's competence, by definition, is another child's incompetence. In the long run, as she is put in competition with larger and larger numbers of children, it will probably be more and more difficult for her to maintain the appearance of competence. After all, both her parents were reasonably successful in school. And yet they have not been able to transform this apparent competence into anything else than a reproduction of the biography of their parents. Whatever their personal competence on any abstract scale, whatever Sheila's competence, there is no justification to assume that their position in life is dependent on it. This must also mean that there is no way to extrapolate any kind of abstract competence to a biography. Sheila's competence will only make a difference for her to the extent that she can integrate it within social systems that will acknowledge it. Tragically enough, this acknowledgement can only be made in the context of some other child's incompetence. Even though Sheila and Joe do not know each other, they are, unwittingly but inescapably, contexts to each other. Similarly the Farrells are contexts to the Kinneys and--to the extent that we, researchers and readers of this report, are members of the same society submitted to the same social forces--we, too, are contexts to them.

To be a context to someone else's performance is, in some way, to be responsible for that other person. But this kind of social responsibility must be understood in a broad fashion. We went to great length in this report not to offer handles for those who would want to blame Joe for his failure, or to congratulate Sheila for her success. We do not want to blame either (or congratulate) their mothers and teachers. They are the most immediate context to Joe's and Sheila's school performance. As such we could suggest ways for Mrs. Kinney to increase Joe's competitiveness by rearranging certain aspects of his immediate environment. We could help the Farrells get Sheila into a school that would challenge her into moving further faster. All this would be nice for the children and their families. At the most explicit levels of their consciousness, this is just what they yearn for: to see their children succeed better in school, go to better schools and--assumedly--to move on to better occupations and incomes than they have.

Such reorganization of these families would not change the social conditions that make such parental efforts necessary. If rewards are distributed in terms of one's place at the finish line of a kind of race, not everybody will get these rewards. However fair the race, only one will win. To improve one person's absolute performance is only efficient if others do not improve theirs. As more and more people compete in marathon races, times which, a generation ago, would have been records are now just good, and the ratio of winners to losers remains the same. However good American schools become, however sensitive American parents become to schools requirements, however sensitive teachers become to familial background, however high average SAT scores become, only so many students will still be admitted to Harvard College. Some others will have to drive our buses and trucks. If we win, it is because others lose. To this extent, we participate in failure.

The issue of responsibility is one that cannot be limited to certain persons and institutions. We are all responsible, though in different ways and for different things. We should encourage Mrs. Kinney to read, to recognize Joe's competence. We should encourage Joe's teachers to challenge him. But those who have the power of making the processes involved explicit, the social scientists and educators, share in the responsibility. They too must be encouraged to do what is in their realm. They are in particular responsible for not diverting attention from the structure of the race as race which makes an issue out of competence. Those who design schools, educators and politicians, also have the responsibility of wondering whether the race is necessary, whether competence should be an issue, why education and literacy should be something to race about, whether the distribution of institutional roles should be done according to other criteria than school-guaranteed competence. Until such questions are answered:

> Never send to know for whom the bell of Joe's failure tolls; it tolls for thee.

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APPENDIX A

The Kinneys: A Profile

(by Ann Morison)

1. Household Composition

Maryanne Kinney and Robert Kinney are both of Irish-American descent. Mrs. Kinney's father was born in County Cork and her mother's people came from the Roscommon region. The Kinney family, being more dispersed and having arrived in America some time earlier, find it more difficult to trace which of their relatives are living in Ireland today.

Mrs. Kinney's father found his way to the Bronx, where he met and married young Katherine Brogan, Mrs. Kinney's mother. K. Brogan came from a large family, having three sisters and three brothers. Those who survived are still living in Kingsland. Mr. Cooney got to know the borough "like the back of his hand" through his job as a city bus driver, a job he held until he retired. Now his favorite pastime is looking over the racing form. Mrs. Kinney characterizes him as a man who says little to family and non-family alike.

Mr. and Mrs. Kinney have been living separately a few doors apart for two years--Mr. Kinney in their former apartment in her aunt's house, and Mrs Kinney in a second-floor apartment in a three-family house around the corner. Their daughter Kathleen, age 11, and son Joe, age 9, live with their mother, but visit regularly and speak frequently with their father (see Figure 6).

Joe, the focal child in the family, has experienced some difficulty with literacy skills as evaluated independently by his parents, school and Teachers College Reading Center. Throughout the year he has left his regular classroom to attend remedial reading and mathematics lessons scheduled twice weekly for each subject. Joe's mother observes him to have "a very short attention span, unable to sit still for explanations, discussions or story telling for even a minute and needing to be up running around much of the time." Frequently, he seems unable to answer questions at home about assigned homework that is reviewed or worked on at home together with either his mother or grand-mother. His SRA test scores and report cards both indicate that he is not reading at grade level. So do the Teachers College Reading Center tests.

Joe can be very active physically--literally attempting to climb walls, running and playing both in the house and outdoors. He can also be quiet as when watching T.V., playing with toys, or looking at comics. In the face of poor leadership he persisted with Cub Scouts. He is on the Little League team. He enjoys sports, "Rigby" in the Post, the family fish tank, electronic pocket games, trains, building battleship models, and eating.

Joe's sister Kathleen is a contrast in many ways. Her father has described her as "the one who's always been more into books and those types of things, whereas the boy likes sports--that's just the difference." Of the two children she has generally been regarded as more studious and more adept socially; only

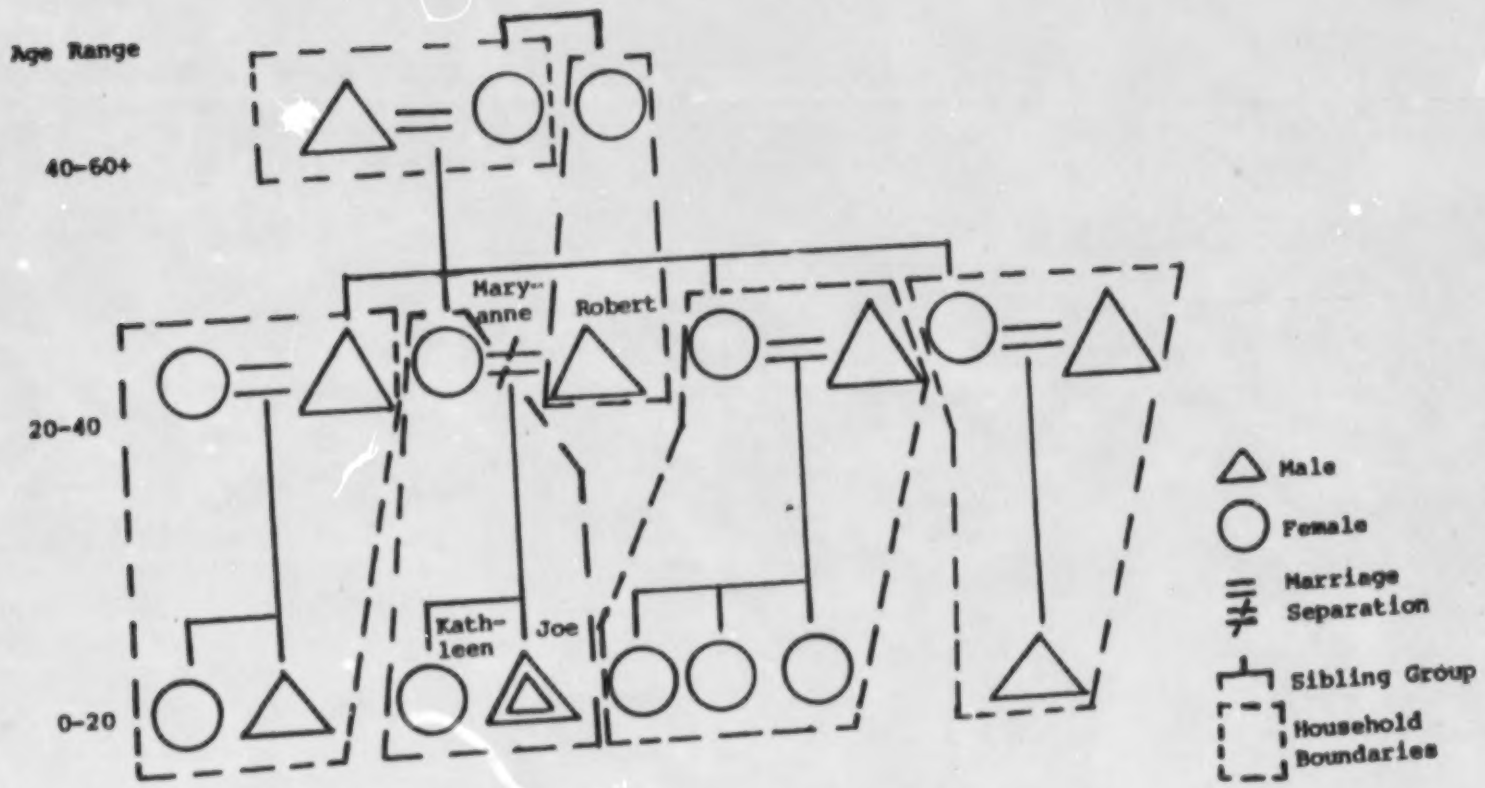

Figure 6. Joe Kinney--Significant Kin

recently have such adolescent concerns as braces, girl friends, prank telephone calls, getting her own way, soap operas, writing and receiving fan letters, and popular singing groups proven of greater interest than bringing home a good report card. She has an undying affection for Mickey Mouse and Raiders of the Lost Ark paraphernalia, collectibles, animals and naming things, and unrelenting fears about rain storms, insects, and the dark. Joe teases Kathleen as much as possible, and they disagree many times on any given day, but not excessively it seems, given the number of hours they spend in each other's company.

Both children have one best same-age friend with whom they spend most of their free time. Mrs. Kinney is a very good friend of Kathleen friend's mother, and she is a friend of Joe's friend's mother. As a result there is probably a little less back-and-forth between the Kinney family and Joe's friend than between the family and Kathleen's friend. Still, Joe's friend is invited over to play often, and seems to be the kind of well-mannered, quiet, considerate child that parents are glad to see. Kathleen and her friend took an oath as blood sisters some time ago, swearing that they would one day pursue the same jobs and share an apartment together. A major consideration just now is gaining the confidence of their parents so as to be able to spend unsupervised tiome together after school or weekends at one house or the other. It has been my observation that both twosomes exclude through word and deed the other sibling with or without friend. Thus there is more diadic than small group socializing going on for both children. Although both children are "close" to their six cousins on their mother's side, they live far enough away that they see one another mainly on special occasions or at prearranged visits, rather than spontaneously.

The other single most significant person moving in and out of the household is Mrs. Kinney's mother. Not infrequently on school days she walks over the first thing in the morning for early coffee and, assuming their mother's role, gets the children up, out, and off to school so that Mrs. Kinney can get an early start to work. Also, unless the children have scheduled after-school activities, it is their grandma who expects them at her house after school, provides the snacks, decides about playing or TV watching, and often, before Mrs. Kinney comes by for them, has the two of them to dinner.

Although Mrs. Kinney's older brother and two younger sisters are all living in the greater metropolitan area, she is the only child who has remained on the block. She feels that she and the children are much more under scrutiny and vulnerable to her mother's influence than if they were living further away. On the other hand, the apartment in her aunt's house across the street from her parents' house, available to her and Mr. Kinney soon after they got married, was such a good and necessary idea financially that staying nearby was the practical thing to do at the time. Recently, while conflicted over both wanting to exercise her independence and feeling she needs the support of her family, Mrs. Kinney has wanted to remain near enough to her husband to make it possible for the children to see their father with ease.

2. Living and Working Arrangements

Mrs. Kinney has worked as a secretary in a multi-tiered federal government agency office for the last ten years. At the time we met, and during other high pressure times as occur based on the fiscal calendar year, she was willing to work six days a week for the overtime pay. Six months ago, she moved vertically into a program assistant position. As such her annual salary increased from about $13,000 to approximately $14,300. Mr. Kinney works as a salesman for a moving company, calling on institutions, small and big companies, or individuals around the city to assess the job and give them estimates. Because of the nature of the company's local organization, Mr. Kinney moved up as high as possible some time ago. Consequently, while the cost of living has increased steadily, his income has remained the same. After ten years he continues to take home after taxes a little less than $200 a week. Although he does what he can for them Mrs. Kinney and the children live primarily on her income.

Both Mr. and Mrs. Kinney completed their education through the twelfth grade at a nearby parochial commercial high school. Since graduation, Mrs. Kinney has preferred to try to gain practical experience through nonschool and work situations, and recounts how the word "college" was never spoken in her childhood home. Increasingly, she has felt the pressure of people with college degrees "jumping over" her at work, and been contemplating the feasibility of enrolling in either a weekend or part-time night program leading toward an associate degree. Mr. Kinney chose to pursue a liberal arts program full time at a major university in the city while working full time. This schedule was ultimately too demanding and ended Mr. Kinney's effort in this direction.

Mrs. Kinney's job requires considerable business literacy skill in a setting which teaches workers fairly complicated, eventually repetitious routines. Her current Processing Department Program Assistant job requires a knowledge of and ability to recognize all the steps which should be taken in each of the housing projects proposals and applications that come for review. Ten sections, including her own, review each folder for completeness and to make sure procedures are followed so that money is reserved for particular aspects of the project. In the final stages of completion, these files are burgeoning and, according to Mrs Kinney, "it's a sin how disorganized" they can be. The sheer volume of paper, i.e., documents, forms, data sheets, supporting material, in combination with multiple-step guidelines, procedures, and requirements, outlined in a massive training volume, can make the processing task "overwhelming," Mrs. Kinney says. Another aspect of the job designed to regulate advancement and, indirectly, skill development, is the civil service rating system used by the agency. This system, which sort of "brands" workers with a particular status, for her is disconcerting and discouraging. In effect, "you are looked at according to your rating." The system determines to a large extent not only who speaks or does not speak to whom and how people treat one another, but also the kind of work that is given to her (e.g., xeroxing) rather than someone else. Indirectly, then, it determines the amount and kind of print a worker reads, writes, and whether this is done in a casual perfunctory manner, or in a careful, in depth manner. Rather than a supervisor introducing new materials in "I know you haven't tried this before, but I'm sure you can do it" atmosphere, work is strictly restricted by status-determined job descriptions which limit exposure to new problems, incentives, and on-the-job learning. Nevertheless, the job

offers security, a commute out of the neighborhood to an interesting part of the city, and a steady income.

The three-family house where Mrs. Kinney and the children live is one of a dozen, narrow, attached houses facing another similar dozen on a quiet residential street "down the hill" about five blocks from the church-school, one block from Main Avenue, the primary commercial street in town. The people who own the house and an older lady and her two sons living on the third floor, have rarely been seen or heard over nearly a year's visits. This particular house is distinguished from the outside by the old, refinished oak door, its red brick construction and front-of-the-house fire escape. The low-to-the-ground black wrought-iron fence gives the impression of fencing off the ground floor windows from the sidewalk. On this particular block, it is one of many houses that has a high stoop and a neat row of battered garbage cans somewhere nearby, with a small patch of grass (and sometimes a tree) in back rather than out front. The sidewalks look swept, and the street itself is usually litter-free, which contributes to an overall sense of orderliness.

Two other notable features about this block are the Leeson lounge, south at the end of the block on the corner at Nashawa Street--the only one in town that opens at 8 a.m. year round--and the tiny white-frame Catholic church continues to hold its 11:a.m. service every Sunday one door from the Kinney home. On the other corner at Nashawa Street, across from the Leeson Lounge, is a drugstore and pharmacy, which takes into account its largely Polish- and English-speaking clientele by posting signs in two languages. It is at Nashawa Street that the blocks running north-south change from strictly residential to a combination commercial-residential, where mostly two floors, sometimes three floors, of apartments are situated above the stores. A few of the stores along Nashawa Street, a main artery for two-way local bus and delivery truck traffic, are equipped with iron gates, and a few are now empty. Ladies sweeping the street and gutter in front of their own places at opening time provide a contrast to the not-as-yet-painted-over graffitti on some of the store fronts. The Kinneys walk one block to Nashawa Street and another block west to the corner of Main Avenue to the subway stop; they buy at one of two delicatessens, a produce market, and at the plaza shop in in that two-block section of Nashawa street. The far side of the cross-street to the north offers a slightly different collection of places to visit--on one corner the local branch of the borough library, which is opened on a very limited basis, and the other corner Howard's delicatessen. A little closer to Main Avenue is the nearest newstand, pizza stand, and a well stocked hobby supply store that Joe and his family frequent.

The door of the Kinney's apartment opens off of the dimly lit, second floor landing at the top of the stairs. Rather than walking up to a closed door, it is customary for visitors to be greeted out in the hallway by one or more family members. Stepping into the square-shaped living room, there is a sense of sparseness, yet the subtle carpeting, dark-wood-veneer paneling, photos, and personal items around the room counter any feelings of bareness.

Directly inside the front door to the right is a long, low wooden table bench, which is both an unloading and sorting spot for whatever is not to be forgotten on the way out. It is the staging area for arrivals and departures. The other furniture in the living room consists of an oversized bentwood and

cane rocking chair, an oak Windsor-style chair, a two-shelf TV table for both the color TV and the stereo receiver-tape player, and a small, round, wooden magazine "tub." The floor is used for watching TV, listening to records, reading, or playing games. If more seating is needed for TV viewing, which seems to happen individually more than in groups, chairs are brought in from the kitchen. Two waist-high to ceiling, built-in bookshelves on the wall facing the door contain porcelain pieces, a small collection of hummel plates, special occasion framed photos, the ten-gallon fish tank, several leprechaun figures, and other prized statuary. The lighting in this room comes from a large, sheer-curtained window during the day and a shaded ceiling fixture at night To the right of the window is the doorway to the good sized, modern bathroom. As a general rule, reading materials are not kept or carried into the bathroom.

To the left of the living room window is the open doorway to the kitchen, the area in the house with the greatest traffic. The closet directly to the left inside the kitchen doorway contains bathroom supplies, linens, and cleaning equipment, plus Mrs. Kinney's file folders for family records. Directly to the right of the doorway is the one telephone in the house--a wall phone with an extra long cord. In back of it on the wall is a small calendar; on the adjacent wall hangs a linen calendar. The other larger wall calendar, on which dates and events are written, is on view between closet and refrigerator. Anyone in the family can and does write on it such reminders as the day and time for: play rehearsals (K), Bingo, tupperware family visits (RA), Little League (J), relatives leaving/returning, birthdays, anniversaries, or special events (anyone).

Most conversations take place in the kitchen, usually while one or more persons are seated in oak captain's chairs around the round wood-grain, formica-top kitchen table. Centered on the wall at a convenient height above the table are two small but most important shelves. On and around them are placed a small collection of tin antique replica containers, postal or greeting cards that have been received, a small piggy bank with the message "Good Luck from Ireland" painted on its side, an occasional newspaper clipping (more often than not an announcement or details of an upcoming event in town), such items as stamps and cigarettes, a clock, a collection of Kathleen's Walt Disney miniatures, and a 7 X's table stenciled on cardboard. This space is used much in the same way as a bulletin board might be used in other homes. Somewhere in this vicinity, maybe just below on the table in a glass bowl, new pieces of information which are brought home, especially from school, come to rest and are reviewed and/or discussed while a disposition is pending. Examples noted over a year's time include a "Treatment Agency Report" (health note) sent home with Kathleen and filled out and signed by the school nurse, an invitation to participate in the YMCA summer day program for children of working parents, a list of items Joe will need to take with him on a Cub Scout camp-out weekend, and a birthday greeting card that was received. Although some bits are around longer than others, most of this information seems to pertain to events which either have just happened or are about to happen. Turnover seems fairly rapid, as this space never becomes cluttered or a storage space. This space functions as a desk would--holding miscellaneous, unrelated material that needs to be reviewed and/or discussed pending a disposition.

Practically within arm's reach across the room from the table, a shallow storage cupboard has been built onto the wall between refrigerator and sink. On top of it, well within reach, is space for a set of three graduated, unlabeled white porcelain covered jars, a large porcelain pitcher and creamer set, glass jars that hold tea, and a wooden roll-top bread box. Sandwiched in on both sides of the box are current bills, correspondence, or other matters which Mrs. Kinney must see to. Centered quietly but prominently above it is a small plaque whose title and message speak of "Mother." It seems appropriately enough placed. It is here that the family is nurtured, food is kept and prepared, and mother makes her determinations about what goes or does not go. Three other plaques in the kitchen are also on this side of the room, hanging just below the cupboards above the kitchen sink. They concern "An Irish Leprechaun," "an Irish Toast," and the Celtic cross and prayer.

A small bunch of selected school work, either in progress of being saved, is attached to the side of the refrigerator near the top at about eye level. The top of the refrigerator is sometimes used to display greeting cards. The only other print to be seen around the kitchen might include a recent city newspaper or the message printed on the pot holder that says, "Gas Heat is Clean Heat. Switch." While such always-in-use items as dish soap, scouring powder, and vitamins sit out, coupons and cookbooks are put away. Although they can be glimpsed in the storage cabinet, neither coupons nor cookbooks have been brought out, used, or shared during the time we have been visiting the family.

Two windows and new, light-colored flooring (always swept, clean and shining) make this room the brightest in the house. The strong overhead light makes the kitchen table the best place to work on sewing and projects and, with the exception of the living room floor, virtually the only well lit place to work on homework.

To the left of the living room is the open archway to Kathleen's area, probably the least private of the sleeping spaces. While it can be closed off by double doors leading to her mother's bedroom, it is clearly visible from the living room and is the route by which both her mother and brother must come and go. Along the way on the left is the family's only common closet/storage space for clothing or other belongings in regular use but needing to be put out of the way. Recently, Kathleen acquired the five-gallon fish tank, purchased originally for the living room, for her two newts, as well as the small antique white dresser where it sits. Next to the tank are her statue of Mary and rosary beads, and her four-shelf bookcase, holding mostly paperback books was moved into the closet. All but the one or two dearest stuffed animals are now in storage. In contrast to the rest of the apartment, the walls of her room are liberally covered with animal or other picture posters, a Mickey Mouse clock, mementos, and keepsakes. Kathleen seems to like to display as much of herself around her room as possible.

On the front of the house, separated by a door on the left side of his mother's room, and at the end of the outside hallway, is Joe's room. It houses his twin bed and dresser, a big stack of comic books, and numerous toys. A ceiling light illuminates the room. A couple of posters of a Star Wars variety are on the walls, as are three crosses, each made of a different material, and over his bed, a crucifix. His window, like the windows in his

mother's room, overlooks Leeson Street.

Like any family in transition, where part of the physical household is in one place and the rest is either somewhere else or was left behind, there is a sense of temporariness, or non-completeness, about the house. Having moved only a year and a half ago to their present apartment and with a very few things, it seems that Mrs. Kinney's first priority was to maintain a sense of continuity for the children. Finding a clean, safe place that was convenient to school and family and affordable was important. Secondary concerns were about furnishings and what to put on the walls. When the new television was bought, and then later the bedroom set, Mrs. Kinney would say, "You can't sit on it, but...," which would indicate that she feels lacking or without certain basic furnishings. On the other hand, she makes no apologies and voices no complaints about the limited surroundings, being more inclined to simply offer a matter of fact "that's the way it is for now" explanation.

The Kinneys seem to arrange themselves with respect to time in ways similar to how they arrange themselves with respect to space, i.e., in a kind of "there is a time and place for everything" fashion. Mrs. Kinney and the children organize their weekdays so as to follow well-established routines before, during, and after work or school; weekends typically are reserved for shopping, outings, Joe or Kathleen sleeping over either at a friend's or their dad's house, special occasion family get-togethers, errand, and church.

As in other limited-space, one bathroom, and working-mother families, a certain amount of negotiation and cooperation need be worked out among family members on the basis of their various personal habits. Since Kathleen is the slowest in the mornings and Joe the fastest, Kathleen gets called a little after 7:00 so she can have 30 minutes to wake up and try to get out of bed. Her mother attributes her getting-up difficulty to her inability or refusal to go to sleep at night, which reportedly is a function of her fear of the dark. Not infrequently, Mrs. Kinney is awakened after midnight or 1:00 a.m., either by the sound of the television or by Kathleen coming into her room. By contrast Joe is ready "in five minutes," so he gets called at 7:30 and is in and out of the bathroom before Kathleen gets off the edge of her bed. She then can spend the next half hour getting ready in her own slow-motion style. Glad for half-hour from 8:00 to 8:30, Joe likes and often will leave by 8:00. If unfinished homework remains from the night before, he will conscientiously complete it in the morning, not liking to go to school without having it finished. The latest either of the children can leave home for the walk "up the hill" to school if 8:15.

Mrs. Kinney puts on coffee and gets ready for work between 7:00 and 7:30. From a transportation point of view, if she leaves at 7:30, she finds that all goes well, she may be able to get to the office by 8:00. The flex-time arrangement at work means that if workers sign in at 8:00, they can leave at 4:30; if they sign in at 8:01, they can leave at 4:31, etc. Another scheduling factor is that the later she leaves, the longer the commute seems to take. Therefore, her mother often comes over so she can leave early before the the kids are ready to go.

Their grandmother will schedule her time so as to be at her house, where they will be expected to go directly after school unless they are participating in an approved scheduled school or group activity. This time together begins sometime between 1:40, when school is dismissed, and 2:00 in the afternoon. Routinely, they change out of their school uniforms for playclothes the first thing. They have a snack, maybe watch TV a bit, and then begin to do their homework.

The children most often eat supper at their grand-parents' house, before their mother collects them when she gets back from work, usually any time between 5:30 and 6:30. By then, unless she has been given extra work, Kathleen usually has her homework out of the way. For Joe, homework time, Stage II, begins when they get back home. This consists of Mrs. Kinney finding out what was assigned, done, and not done before they sit down together at the kitchen table to finish it. This very often continues until 9:00 p.m. or until they both "had it," or until bedtime. Mrs. Kinney will often fix her own supper while she talks to the kids.

3. Institutional Arrangements

It is Mrs. Kinney's mother who is able to point out along what street, in which parks and neighborhoods, the town has changed. While these changes and the new faces they have brought are not altogether welcome, they are accommodated through a sort of "us-them" world view and resigned, resistant acceptance of a "what can you do?" nature. Reportedly, there is a racist sentiment and commentary aplenty in her parents' house, which Mrs. Kinney rejects and dislikes because of how it influences the children. To her dismay, both Joe and Kathleen have been heard to express the sentiments of their elders about the obstacles of "too many blacks" at certain recreation areas or a general fear and suspicion of where Hispanics are working and living. The third generation clucking-of-tongue point of view can be overheard sitting next to a group of men talking politics over morning coffee at the local McDonald's. It is echoed by gray-haired ladies jostled by rambunctious youths near the bus stop. It is the view that their tax dollars built and maintained the community for all these years only to see it being taken over by youth from neighboring communities where the people have not worked and planned. Now the kids of Joe's and Kathleen's generation are being pushed out by large groups of hostile outsiders, who are claiming it as their territory and who are not of a mind to share. Hence, in what is articulated, there is the posture of being threatened as well as being encroached upon. There seems to be no desire on the part of the old community to work together or share space with people who seem neither to invest in or care about the community. Instead, a separatist or segregationist policy has been set up as a way of coping with these newcomers. By contrast, people of various ethnic extraction who are working and/or living in the town--the Chinese greengrocers on Main Avenue and the large number of Polish families, schoolmates, and shopkeepers--seem to be more acceptable.

It seems, then, that in part the Kinneys are Irish, by virtue of not being newcomers, black, Hispanic, Oriental, or Polish. Moreover this knowledge is deeply rooted in the greater knowledge they convey concerning what the community consisted of when they arrived and what they have done, both as home

owners and through the church, to establish and maintain themselves, their facilities, and their children, and their children's children.

On a more personal basis, the family surname, when spoken or written, is used to signal others who are of the same group. It is surely not chance that that while the family is out for a walk, it is waylaid by a McGouhglin and greeted by an O'Leary. Not only does Mrs. Kinney place herself as Irish, but others classify her as such for purposes of some specific kinds of social interaction. When they meet, others do not stop and join in the conversation, even if they are nodding acquaintances. In this way, certain boundaries are maintained between people with a certain name and people without those certain names. At home, their name and coat of arms adorn the ashtray in the kitchen, and the beach towel in the bathroom--emblems which make a difference to them, and which are recognizable to others. These emblems are displayed by choice and are most relevant to the few people who use them.

Possibly it is the impossible-to-separate, intertwined nature of the Catholic Church--parochial school which is so notably represented by the combination of pieces which stand for either Irish or Catholic, or both. In the most public room, the kitchen, it is difficult to gaze at something "Irish" without the eye also taking in an item which says "Catholic." The china piggy bank with the words, "Good Luck from Ireland" painted on the side, sits on the shelf above the kitchen table. Attached to the bottom of the same shelf is Joe's (parochial) school picture, showing the children in their traditional uniforms behind a sign that names the school. Above the kitchen sink, below the cupboards at about adult eye level, hangs a plaque with the Celtic cross and a prayer to "An Irish Toast" plaque. As the eye continues around the room, it moves from the next plaque, "An Irish Leprechaun," to the molding at the end of the wall of the area above the storage cabinet which holds two small religious pictures, one of Mary, one of the Holy Family. On the table there may be a candle with a map of Ireland on it as well as the Kinney ashtray.

The family attends Mass every Sunday, sometimes in the morning, often at 6:30 in the evening. They attend even in the hottest weather, although during the summer time they may walk the other direction to "St. Stan's" because it has air conditioning. They dress informally, attendance and comfort being primary, looks secondary. Individually, Joe attends altar boy meetings, Kathleen is proud to display her various strands of rosary beads, and Mrs. Kinney occasionally mentions quietly the significance of prayer as it relates to particular circumstances or outcomes. Mrs. Conney mentions news which pertains to members of her Rosary Club. Mrs Kinney herself must either see to it that she schedules herself to work at church Bingo a minimum of three evenings a year or else be assessed a healthy fine. A contingent responsibility on these occasions is selling "chances." Since workers who are assigned to sell chances are [redacted] strictly monitored by bosses, in terms of time spent and number of chances sold, it can turn out to be an unenjoyable activity where the the emphasis is more on earning money than conviviality. In addition to Bingo assignments, the family is encouraged to participate throughout the year in any number of other church-sponsored social events, the primary purpose for which, according to Mrs. Kinney, is also to raise money. In lieu of full disclosure on fiscal matters, fund-raising efforts by the church continue to be something of a battle. Mrs. Kinney explains that parishioners who have sought to find out the budgetary

particulars on money that is raised have found it difficult to get records or sometimes even adequate explanations. As a result, announcements pertaining to changes in programs or plans which appear in the church bulletin are sometimes surprising and may not follow resolutions arrived at through open discussions on topics of concern. The net result is that, while the school continues to ask for increases in tuition, requests either for an accounting or changes in tuition policy seem to fall on deaf ears. Mrs. Kinney, in the end, is obliged to pay more tuition as long as she wants to send the children to parochial school. As she has experienced it, this factor in the family-school-church equation seems to be a rather weak one, adding to her overall sense of dissatisfaction with the school, what it offers and what it costs.

4. Pedagogical arrangements

The philosophy of the school is reflected in many ways by how personnel run the front office, by how the building is used, and by the church pastor's Home-School Association meeting "kick-off" speech to parents in the fall.

The several entrances to the school are kept locked at all times, including the front door, and visitors are asked about their business through the door before being allowed to enter the building. Once inside, the main office is straight ahead. Two outer offices are occupied by a small caudry of adult helpers, who answer the phone, deal with children who come and go, query visitors, greet people they know, make coffee, keep records, put notes in mailboxes, and chat among themselves. An important part of their work seems to be to insulate the principal, who by her appearance no longer gives any outward sign that she is a nun, from intrusion or interruptions by outsiders. In terms of who does what, for whom, a pecking order seems to operate among the staff. Seeming to prefer to deal through a go-between, rather than directly, with people who are unknown to her, the principal employs the ladies in the outer offices as a sort of "palace guard" to protect her office, where she seems to stay a good deal of her time.

Entering and moving around this school freely is not easy in my experience. Permission must be sought in writing and given in advance by the principal to speak to each and every person visitors want to speak or observe. Spontaneous requests for permission to speak directly to a teacher for a particular reason are turned down out of hand; access decisions of this type are made by the office, not by the teacher. Visitors are not given directions to go upstairs or to a particular room, but escorted instead. Displayed prominently in the front office is a large sign which which endorses QUIET. The atmosphere is subdued. Movements appear to be restrained in Joe's classroom. Above all, the school seems to want to give an impression of orderliness, including during lunch time and in the hall lining up to be dismissed at the end of the day.

Classrooms and hallways appear ultra clean and tidy. Although they are not bolted to the floor, desks are arranged in perfectly straight, equidistant rows. In Joe's classroom the teacher expends considerable energy on trying to maintain order, has rules to keep the boys and girls in order (meaning in their seats) and prefers asking questions in highly ordered fashion (e.g., "Number 31--next, Number 32--correct, Number 33--good") to discussion. In other

words, there appears to be someone in authority always around to impose standards of correctness and acceptability.

Rounding out the impression the school gives of itself are the words of Father Pazzarro to his parishioners-parents on October 7, 1980. Several examples noted down that evening include the following:

> "Children don't come to our schools for an education--they can get that in the public sector. They come for values; a sense of worth.
>
> Self-respect will show in how they dress. For example, your home, school church is only as clean as the dirtiest person.
>
> The biggest thing the Catholic schools can do is to teach self-esteem. Also a sense of sin--a child should not leave the primary grades without a formed conscience."

Other thoughts on parenting were contained in a bulletin, "From the Pastor's Desk," which makes the point, "Yours is the most awesome responsibility in this world, namely, the raising of your children to be knowledgeable, God-loving, worshipping, and practicing Catholics." Parents are told that they do teach: "You teach your children to pray."

It should be pointed out that Mrs. Kinney makes clear in word and deed that she is not in full agreement with the pastor or his message. Nor, she says, are some of the other parishioners who are looking for a different, less severe tone and a fresh outlook. Nevertheless, he continues to fill the role of one of the community's primary spiritual and educational leaders and is regarded accordingly.

At school Joe has been observed to be able to do an exceptionally good job of responding to directions, doing better than many of his classmates. In a strict "Don't speak unless you are spoken to" environment, he keeps still for the most part. In a "turn around and face me" environment, he stays seated, face front. Whereas a good number of his classmates will talk out of turn, ignore the teacher, get out of their seats and move around the room without permission, make noise or otherwise cause a disturbance, Joe will sit straight, look ahead, focus his gaze on his books (except if he falls behind and needs to find out what the class is doing), and in general behave in such a way as to prompt his teacher to write "Joe is a very nice boy. It's a pleasure to have him in my class" (see Figure 5).

In fact, Joe works very slowly, carefully, and quietly. He appears to ponder his work an item at a time for a long time before moving on to the next problem. On a routine language arts assignment, where questions were copied from the book and answers were filled in, Joe worked independently and diligently. When students were called upon to answer questions orally, Joe did not raise his hand; however, answers he gave when called upon were correct. As with the other student who gave correct answers, the teacher acknowledged as much. At no time did he behave in such a way as to distinguish himself. All in all, Joe appears to be the type of student who, because he keeps a low profile, can go overlooked in a classroom.

As it turns out, the method of instruction used at home by Joe's mother is reminescent of the method of instruction used at school by Joe's teacher in class. Both in a school setting and at home, individual initiative flags in the face of being proded. Most interesting in all of this, however. is the fact that while Joe is obedient, quiet, and extremely self-contained while work is being directed at schoool, at home more often than not he cannot organize himself in any of these ways.

5. Learning about literacy

The Kinneys were open to me during a critical time in their evolution. Consequently, layered on top of what is known about where literacy artifacts are located and how literacy is used at home and on the job, are the particular marital, parental, and intergenerational stresses and strains with which Mr. and Mrs. Kinney have been contending during this time of separation. In the following pages, what is dealt with is the day-to-day implications of these stresses and strains for their children's learning. The focus is upon describing what actions are taken or not taken, and the amount and kind of energy and attention focused on the children in general, their school work or problems in particular as well as what they do with their free time. Intertwined with these aspects of how learning is being accomplished at the present time are indications of the degree of involvement between the family and extended family members, and between the family and the church/school.

One way in which Mrs. Kinney decided to take action, and focus on her youngest child concerns the searching out of potentially helpful, professional guidance in the matter of Joe's apparent non-learning about literacy. She made this decision independently of her husband, and over the objections of her mother. This involved a formal evaluation of Joe's litearcy skills on a range of tasks. What Joe might have learned about himself, as a result, is that he has learned a lot by this age and that he does not have to harbor unspoken fears about his inabilities. If he did not come to know this, it might be because not very much seemed to change around his house, even after some specific recommendations pointed to encouraging reading in a new and different context.

Since Mrs. Kinney was able in some ways to use the assessment of Joe offered by the Teachers College Reading Center, [redacted] we quoted at some length for the comments made by the testers (see pp. 115-7). Mrs. Kinney registered a certain amount of relief, surprise, and pleasure with me over the fact that Joe had been found to possess the skills and abilities to be an adequate reader. The security that comes with that knowledge may be primary, whereas a push for increased accomplishment may be secondary. Accordingly, while she continues to sit and work with him on school work on a one-to-one basis, it seems there is little time left over for organizing "free" reading of the fun or pleasurable type mentioned above. Indeed, homework takes the lion's share of the family's time and attention weekday afternoons and evenings. Although I offered both information on where to buy Tintin books and to give one as a gift, Mrs. Kinney chose not to follow up on this. When an issue was finally brought to the house and left lying around, Mrs. Kinney observed that Joe found it, seized it, carried it around, looked at it over and over, and

enjoyed it tremendously. On other occasions he has had fun looking up desired items in his Cub Scout equipment catalog that came through the mail, has been pleased to read, with meaning, from his Great Sports Book (a gift from his dad), has kept and shown us his Revell Model Builders Club membership card, and refers to his copies of Boys Life, for which he has a subscription. This is to say nothing of his tall stack of comic books, mostly science fiction, that he goes to, or his baseball cards, or food coupons, or the "Rigby" cartoons that he interprets for the rest of the family. Then there are the kids' magazines --Hot Dog, Star Log, and Fantastic Films--about the only reading material shared by Joe and Kathleen. In addition, he has had a good time locating particular items in his New York Yankee Merchandise Catalogue, referring to his Big Book of Trains, looking at either What's up for Lunch Charley, a scholastic book club selection, or, from the library, Creatures from Lost Worlds.

Some of these books are, of necessity, used not just to derive a sense of reading for pleasure but for a book report "for the reading teacher, not our real book reports," Joe explains. These particular reports are supposed to include answers to certain specific questions. The report formula is handed out to each student on a ditto sheet, as follows: (1) Title of your Book? (2) Who is the author? (3) Write a summary about the story you read. (4) Describe the main characters in the story. (5) Would you recommend this book to a friend? Why or why not? (6) Did you learn any new words by reading this story? (7) Draw a book cover. Feature a scene. In terms of learning about purposeful reading, the main thing Joe seems to have learned about book reports is that one teacher wants one thing and another asks another thing. Also, in the end, one wonders if whatever pleasure there might have been in the reading, was either diminished or transformed into displeasure as a result of such an exercise.

Although the atmosphere in the family is loving and seems basically on an even keel (in spite of the tensions which arise from time to time with Joe over bad manners and teasing, or Kathleen over being devious or wanting to to exclude Joe), working through the details of how to get along together in a less then unified, financially secure environment requires weighing certain goals and preferences against certain other necessitites and practical considerations. For example, both parents have had to decide individually against pursuing different or more satisfying work for the time being because one does not know if child support will come through and the other finds his tax status changed. Also, Mrs. Kinney must weigh spending an occasional Saturday or possibly several nights a week to go to school herself against working Saturdays for the extra pay and giving her time as much as possible to the children week nights.

Mrs. Kinney devotes a considerable amount of time and energy to insure that certain well-established routines are followed. While this does not represent a radical departure from what she has always encouraged, of late there may have been a tendency or perceived need to "tighten the reins." A number of factors in combination, such as Mrs. Kinney's restricted social life, her husband's absence, signs from Joe last summer that he was beginning to test his parents' authority, as well as his tendency to alternate between shy-tentative and angry-aggressive behavior, and recent changes in Kathleen's

behavior at home and attitudes about school that have come about during the seventh grade and have accompanied the onset of puberty, could well accentuate Mrs. Kinney's feelings that what the family needs more than anything else--including learning abut literacy--is structure. As a result, I have observed an emphasis on staying in close contact with one another, participating fully in the kids' activities, directing, trying to minimize upsets, trying to make life predictable and as enjoyable as possible for the children in little ways, and, in general, organizing space and time at home as carefully as possible.

Sources of tuition for parochial school, especially for Kathleen's high school, pose an on going dilemma confounded by Mrs. Kinney's dissatisfaction with both poor teaching and ques ionable leadership, and her own educational experience, which she now feels left her ill prepared.

Another difficulty concerns the extent of the need for Mrs. Kinney to rely on her mother. They do not see eye to eye on such matters as whether or not Mrs. Kinney should take issue with the school, Joe should be allowed to go beyond certain streets alone, Kathleen should be exposed to hours of soap operas, or Joe should have his homework done for him so that he can go out and play. While Mrs. Kinney feels she "can't tell her mother what to do" and does rely on her for help, she is outspoken in her disagreement with her about the benefit to her children of such predilections.

Individual differences in educative style among family members suggest that it might be difficult to characterize the Kinneys in term of a particular overall style. However, the way in which they all "initiate, search for, absorb, synthesize, and critically appraise the various educative influences in their environment" (Leichter, 1973: 240) seems definitely to be linked to an intergenerational cycle of limited expectations, challenges, and opportunities for learning that cuts across individual differences. All three family members could be said to exhibit "a closed circle" educative style whereby what is learned through social interactions at home is sustained, modified, and confirmed also by the church and the school, and vice versa. Basic knowledge, values, and attitudes imparted by any one institution are essentially accepted and encouraged in the other two. As Father Pazzaro tells the parents "Your home, your school, your church, is only as clean as the dirtiest person. This is also true of their moral value." This is not to say that learning takes place either exclusively in these settings or that what is learned there goes unchallenged. Nor is it to say that mother and children do not experience success or that they do experience continual or chronic failure. It is to suggest a pattern of limited achievement, where opportunities for making choices are minimized, where new ideas and conflict, and being successful comes as something of a surprise.

Although Mrs. Kinney is brave enough to challenge verbally the prevailing system, there are sufficient social and cultural mores of the type mentioned above operating to counteract her efforts to deviate, question authority, and criticize when she disagrees. As a result, she expresses frustration for herself and, in turn, for her children, over reaching out for new experiences and opportunities versus staying within the secure confines of what is familial and/or well known. At the same time, as a woman, Mrs. Kinney has been trained not to be competitive outside the home, and to believe that she is measured primarily against how "well," i.e., in harmony with the community, she raises her children.

Currently, there are other reasons for shifting the focus from trying to change Joe, to focusing attention on the school. As the buffer between an older and younger generation, Mrs. Kinney is in a position not only to try to mediate what the school requires, but also to diffuse what her own parents and training dictate so that her children might have a different educational experience than she did. Yet, against a personal family education history that imbued her with feeling of intellectual inferiority and a fatalistic "You're either born with it or you're not" belief system, until recently she had adopted similar strategies for explaining any difficulties Joe might have in school. Now the school is more and more the focus of her consternation. This was fueled by her greater belief in Joe's ability. Now, armed with a positive outlook and having modified her stance on genetic limitations, the school, and a few teachers in particular, are looking less and less blameless, more and more disappointing.

Believing that Joe could surely do better in a different kind of school, with different kinds of learning experiences and materials, creates several dilemnas. Short term, it means risking strained relations with the school/church as well as her parents and friends. Also, it requires performing a critical self-examination--"Should I bow to pressure or do what I believe is best and right?" This question turns out to be a recurring one in Mrs. Kinney's own life experience and now seems to confound her relationships with her children. A related long-range dilemma logically concerns whether or not she would be actually hurting or helping her children's future chances for happiness and success by not saying, in effect, "Stay within a safe distance and you won't find out you can't make it."

In spite of her conflicted thoughts about what is best and what is inevitable, and in the midst of whatever dissatisfactions she feels with the limitations which constrain her, Mrs. Kinney does not throw up her hands, let exasperation win out or stop her in her own search for solutions. She wants Joe to be able to read and to understand what he read . In this regard she is steadfast. Living a life which to her is a daily testimonial to missed opportunity and uninformed parental advice, she is about creating opportunity for learning for her children in whatever ways she can, and informing herself as a parent. In doing so, she reaches beyond "the closed circle" however and whenever she deems it possible. Simultaneously, in the main, she receives strong institutional encouragement to remain safe "inside" the circle.